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Race, Development, and National Identity in Panama

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Race, Development, and National Identity in Panama

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Abstract

Race, Development and National Identity in Panama

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After reversion of Canal ownership from the U.S. to Panama in 1999, the construction of Panamanian national identity became deeply tied to notions of development. This thesis explores how the discourse of development is created, circulated and negotiated through important Panamanian cultural institutions. It shows how race and raced bodies became the dominant site for the negotiation of Panamanian national identity in the post-Reversion era. This discourse of development promotes the "myth of mestizaje"—a myth that the nation is homogeneous and without racial difference. Through the example of Panama, we perceive the cracks in the global notion of development as "common sense" and uniformly experienced.

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Introduction

"The past—or, more accurately, pastness—is a position"
Michel-Rolph Trouillot[1]

In an official publicity comic strip disseminated by the Panama Canal Authority in support of their proposed 2006 referendum for the expansion of the Canal, a white man stops to help a black man whose car has broken down. The black man works from a taxicab called "Atraso" (regression, or, backwards progress), while the white man drives a bus called "Progreso" (progress). As the white man helps fix the taxicab, the two men discuss important current events—the proposed expansion of the Canal. The white bus driver goes on to explain the benefits of the expansion, arguing the pros of big business growth in the Canal for small businesses, and touting the bright socioeconomic future of a developed Panama.

At the end of the pamphlet, the black man ditches his broken down taxi and jumps on the Progress bus, yelling "No me quiero quedar" (I don't want to stay/be left behind).[2] The comic strip clearly shows a concern with a historical narrative of development—from "Atraso" to "Progreso"—and the negative position of pastness is associated with the black subject. The "regressed" black subject is placed as the 'Other' that needs, and thus justifies, development. My work will explore the centrality of race to contemporary discourses of development in Panama, where development has become the onus of national identity. I argue that the various institutions that preserve and represent historical

[1] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 15.
[2] I will discuss further details about this comic strip in Chapter 2.

memory in Panama position black people in a backwards "past" that justifies present-day development and promotes the idea of a racially harmonious Panama.

Trouillot's statement urges a contextualization of representations of the past as positioned to the present in which they are created, consumed, archived and analyzed. My goal in this project is to read and question how historical narratives in Panama are represented in relation to the hegemonic discourse of national development. The main narrative dominating contemporary Panama is that, through cultural globalization and economic expansion in the Canal, it can be a "big player" on a global scale on par with developed countries such as the US, and can successfully manage the Canal. This end goal of development is necessarily tied into a historical narrative—a comparison between the "before" (the underdeveloped) and the "after" or future of development. I argue that these historical discourses of development use race as a justification, positioning blackness in the past and envisioning a future of racial homogeneity.

Development has become a popular topic of study recently, but mostly as an economic and/or technological phenomenon. In this project, I want to explore development as a discourse, a cultural narrative that serves to justify the present course of action. My goal is not to criticize the historical narratives proposed by these places as inaccurate in their representation of the past. Instead, it is to analyze how the narrative of a raced, backwards past and a developed future is used by, created, promoted and negotiated by various Panamanian institutions.

This project will explore the raced dimensions of the historical narratives promoted by development initiatives in Panama, questioning who is positioned as the

"developed subject." In this, I follow David Goldberg's question: Who is capable of development and who is subjected to it, who is capable of autonomous development and who should be directed?[3] Ultimately, I am interested in the historical narratives these projects create to justify development and the notions of national identity that are promoted through these narratives—what are the omissions or inclusions in the image of the "developed nation" that Panamanian institutions propagate? Three thematic threads come together in this discussion: national identity formation in Panama, the relationship between development and race, and the hybrid negotiation of modernity.

NATIONAL IDENTITY

Though identity is never experienced homogeneously, the idea of stable national identities dominates hegemonic discourse. Stuart Hall explains in the case of Britain that "It was only by dint of excluding or absorbing all differences that constituted Englishness…that Englishness could stand for everybody in the British Isles."[4] The imagined homogeneity of a population and the exclusion of "Others" is what creates feelings of national identity. Benedict Anderson explored the formation of this "imagined community" with his definition of the nation imagined as limited, sovereign and a community.[5] However, Panama, in its 1903 legal inception, did not fulfill any of these

[3] David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: philosophy and the politics of meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 148. His questions is about the "Moral Subject" created by the Enlightenment project: "who is capable of moral action and who is subjected to it, who is capable of moral autonomy and who should be directed."

[4] Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," in *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 22.

[5] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 7.

requirements. It did not hold sovereignty over its territory, was composed largely of a migrating population, and had a strong segregation system that prohibited the emergence of a "deep, horizontal comradeship" between Zonians[6] and Panamanians.[7] Panama's national identity is strongly tied to its relationship with the Canal, to the global forces of commerce, and to the largest group of migrants that entered during the time of construction—black West Indians.

The country's geographic location has been important since the days of Spanish colonization. Panama City (on the Pacific) and Portobello (on the Atlantic side) grew as major ports in *La Ruta de Plata* (the Silver Route) that linked the Atlantic to the Viceroyalty of Peru. As in other Latin American and Caribbean spaces, the indigenous populations were heavily diminished through disease and warfare during the colonization period, though strong indigenous communities, like the Kuna, survive in Panama. During this time, African slaves were brought to Panama through the Middle Passage as early as 1511 to replace the exterminated indigenous laborers.[8]

Panama declared its independence from Spain in 1821 and immediately went into a voluntary union with Colombia, in which it remained until the U.S. Canal construction. In this same era, groups of black workers traveled from the Caribbean to work on various construction projects in Northern Panama. This trickle held steady through the nineteenth century to support the construction of the Panama Railway, a project funded by American

[6] Zonians are residents of the Canal Zone, usually referring only to Americans.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Trevor O'Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship: The Evolution of Black West Indian Society in Panama 1914-1964* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 27-28.

businessman W.H. Aspinwall to augment trade from the California Gold Rush.[9] France attempted to build a canal in Panama in the late nineteenth century, during which the Isthmus became a major destination in the black Caribbean diaspora. The project was a financial failure and was abandoned in 1889.

In 1902, the U.S. Congress authorized President Theodore Roosevelt to acquire land from the Colombian government to build an inter-oceanic canal in the strategic position of Panama. One year later, the Republic of Panama declared its independence from Colombia, with some influence from US interests. Two weeks later, Phillipe Bunau-Varilla, a French engineer standing as representative of Panama, negotiated the future site of the Canal with Secretary of State John Hay and the U.S. Congress. Without the participation of any Panamanians, the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty was signed, granting sovereignty to the US over a ten-mile-wide strip of land along the canal, from Panama City and the Bay of Panama to Colón and the Caribbean Sea.[10] The year 1903 thus marks the legal birth of the Panamanian nation, the start of the American colonization of the Canal Zone, and the beginning of a massive black diaspora into Panama.

The theme of Panamanian nationalism dominated political discussion during this period and several separatist and federalists movements were organized. Justo Arosemena, writer, politician and fervent supporter of Panamanian autonomy of the time, stated that Panama was historically individualized by its interoceanic transit function and

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[9] Senator Anthony S. Johnson, "The Jamaica-Panama Connection," *West Indian Participation in the Construction of the Panama Canal,* Publication of the Proceedings of Symposium held at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica. June 15-17, 2000 (Kingston, Jamaica: Latin American Caribbean Center, University of the West Indies, 2000), 7.

10 This is quite the story, though beyond the scope of this historical note. See John Major, "Part I: Prelude," in *Prize Possession: The United States and the Panama Canal, 1903-1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

by its geographic position since the days of Spanish colonialism. Ricaurte Soler, preeminent Panamanian nationalist historian, called this the "geographical myth.[11]" This "geographical myth" dominates conceptions of Panamanian nationality and continues to serve as the official response to problems of social, racial and ethnic cohesion. Notions of development in Panama are all closely tied to this "geographical myth" and the economic future promised by the Canal. In this conception, Panama is defined by its "service to the world."

The US began construction on the canal project in 1903. From 1903 to 1908, the Canal Zone was administered by the Isthmian Canal Commission. During the decade of construction (1904-1914), over three-quarters of the workforce came from the British West Indies, a tidal wave of immigration. The American regime would stay in place until 1977, during which time the Canal Zone was run as a separate "nation within a nation." During this time, the economic gains of the Canal Zone were unevenly distributed to Panama, and Panamanians were not allowed to freely visit the Canal Zone. These historical moments—early Spanish colonization, the railroad and French Canal, and the American Canal construction—are all characterized by a similar mode of exploitation. All these moments, which have been recast as phases in Panamanian development and modernization, were based on the migration and labor of black people, whether African slaves in the Spanish era or paid, segregated Caribbean workers in the Canal.[12]

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[11] Ricaurte Soler has written many books concerning Panamanian autonomy including: *Pensamiento Panameño* (Librería Cultural Panameña, 1978) and *Panama: Historia de una crisis* (Siglo XXI, 1989).
[12] See the work of Gerardo Maloney for more historical notes on blacks in Panama, and Velma Newton, *The Silver Men: West Indian Labour Migration to Panama, 1850-1914* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2004) for more information on the laborers of the Canal construction.

After political unrest, particularly the Flag Riots of 1964 (a student-led protest to display the Panamanian flag in the Canal Zone), negotiations began to oust the American presence in the Canal Zone. Lt. Colonel Omar Torrijos, who became president after a military coup in 1968 overthrowing Arnulfo Arias, signed the Torrijos-Carter Treaties in 1977 with US President Jimmy Carter, setting the deadline for America's military presence in Panama to December 31st, 1999. These two events signal another crux in Panamanian national identity, and they are the two most memorialized moments of nationalist resistance against American occupation. The era surrounding the Torrijos-Carter Treaties saw a newfound investment in crafting Panamanian identity, both spatially, by dissolving the Canal Zone, and culturally, with the founding of the National Institute of Culture.

The period between 1977and 1999 was marked by political troubles, most notably the military leadership of Manuel Noriega and his deposition by the 1989 US invasion in Operation Just Cause (justified as part of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties, which allowed the US freedom of military movement for the protection of the Canal).[13] In response to the economic troubles of the previous era, Ernesto Perez Balladares, who was elected president in 1994, enacted a series of neoliberal economic reforms, privatizing several Panamanian businesses and selling them to international conglomerates. This began an era of economic growth and increasing international investment in Panama, particularly in its banking industry.

[13] For more on this, see Lawrence Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Origins, Planning and Crisis Management, June 1987-December 1989*, U.S. Army Center for Military History (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008) and Ricaurte Soler, *La Invasión de Estados Unidos a Panamá: neocolonialismo en la posguerra fría* (Mexico, D.F.: Siglo XXI, 1991).

In 1999, the US government finally relinquished the area to the Panamanian state, which had not held sovereignty over all of its national territory until then. The period of economic globalization of Balladare's presidency coincided with the reversion of the Canal Zone. Since then, several state-backed organizations such as the Panama Canal Authority and the National Institute of Culture have begun instituting development strategies in hopes of elevating Panama in the global economy and political/cultural sphere. Panamanian scholar George Priestley argues that in the decade following Balladares' presidency (1994-2004), "there was an observable increase in racial discrimination, over racist practices, and social disparity on the Isthmus of Panama," due mainly to the embrace of neo-liberalism by white economic and political elites in the "so-called transition to democracy."[14] The adoption of neo-liberal development policies in the mid-90s had a clear relationship to growing racial discrimination.

I will give only a short explanation of the racial formation of Panama, a topic which could take up a much longer piece. Like many other Latin American countries, race in Panama is perceived as invisible—the "myth of mestizaje" that whites, indigenous natives and colonial blacks have interrelated so much as to dilute their individual differences into a single "Panamanian" race.[15] In this system, the only racial difference is between the mestizo and the black people of West Indian descent (usually those with English last names). In truth, black people of diverse origins (both "colonial" and "Antillanos") and many indigenous groups face political, economic and cultural

[14] George Priestley and Alberto Barrow, "The Black Movement in Panama: A Historical and Political Interpretation, 1994-2004," *Souls* 10, 3, New Social Movements in the African Diaspora I (2008): 227.
[15] For more on the myth of mestizaje, see, among others, Roldolfo Stavenhagen, "Challenging the nation-state in Latin America," *Journal of International Affairs* 45, 2 (1992): 421-440. For racial formation in Panama, see the work of George Priestley.

discrimination throughout Panama. However, the only "Other" race commonly accepted are the Antillanos or *chombos*.[16] West Indian black people are still perceived as immigrants or interlopers, unassimilated into the nation.

The discourses of development in Panama are part of a larger process of nation building spurred by the 1979 Torrijos-Carter Treaties and more recently, the 1999 reversion of the Canal to Panamanian ownership. This process has attempted to create a homogenous national identity, one that Stuart Hall would describe as an "old" collective identity, defined by its relationship to industrialization, capitalism, the sexual and racial division of labor, the dominance of the nation state, and the identification of Westernization with modernity.[17] As Hall further explains, these identities are always constructed through ambivalence between that and the "Other," and even more so in the present moment, when the notion of the coherent subject is threatened by growing discourses of resistance. The renarrativization of Panamanian history after reversion must deal with the friction created by the presence of black West Indians, who disrupt the idea of a harmonious mestizo nation and recall the conflicting moment of national creation in 1903.

Appadurai argues that modern subjectivities are best understood through a conception of "the work of imagination" as "an organized field of social practices, a form of work…and a form of negotiation between sites of agency and globally defined fields

[16] A pejorative term for black West Indians.
[17] Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities," in *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 45.

of possibility."[18] My work here will attempt to understand the contemporary formation of national identity in Panama through these processes of imagination, rather than as a stable identity category.

DEVELOPMENT, RACE AND THE PAST

"The past is now not a land to return to in a simple politics of memory. It has become a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios, a kind of temporal central casting, to which recourse can be taken as appropriate, depending on the movie to be made, the scene to be enacted, the hostages to be rescued." [19]
—Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy"

The formation of Panama's national identity depends on its project of development; Panama must prove to the international community that it is financially and culturally capable of administering the globally significant structure that is the Canal. More than having a thriving technological, productive base, Panama must also prove itself part of cultural modernity, able to provide a stable government and financial sector, an attractive tourism infrastructure, and enough exoticism to promote its difference. Historical narratives are used throughout development projects in Panama as a "synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios" to advance the nation as sufficiently developed. In these projects, Panama's past is recast in a nationalistic mode and black subjects are used to provide folklore.

There is an abundant literature about development and particularly development in the "Third World." Early policy considerations on development in the 60s and 70s

[18] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 31.
[19] Ibid, 30.

sought to apply solutions to the perceived problems of the underdeveloped world.[20] Critiques of this model arose in the 80s and 90s, citing its eurocentricity and linearity. At the same time, cultural studies scholars began assessing the role of culture in development.[21] Nowadays, culture is seen as an essential component of development strategies, though still secondary to economic concerns.[22] More recent works have focused on approaching new models, such as sustainable development. However, none of these studies have explored the representation of development as a historical narrative, nor have they addressed race as a central organizing idea of development strategies.

In Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World, Arturo Escobar conducts a history of the invention of development.[23] Development strategies in the post-World War II period, he argues, emerged from the "problematization of poverty," the professionalization of development knowledge and the "institutionalization of development practices." These techniques allowed the post-war world powers to transfer the colonial authority to development as a modern version of colonial intervention. Thus, development served to reorganize the socio-economic relations that were being challenged by anticolonial movements in the 30s, 40s and 50s. The discourse of First World/Third World and developed/underdeveloped allowed "a

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[20] See Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[21] See Immanuel Wallerstein, "The capitalist world economy: essays and World-systems analysis: An Introduction," in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System*, Anthony King, ed. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minessota Press, 1991); Sarah Radcliffe, ed. *Culture and Development in a Globalizing World: Geographies, Actors and Paradigms* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006).

[22] See, for example, the 2010 UNESCO brochure "The Power of Culture for Development," which shows both the rise of culture as an important part of development policy and its larger economic frame. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001893/189382e.pdf (accessed April 21, 2012).

[23] Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development*.

panoply of interventions" in health, education and morality of the labeled "Third World" countries.[24] By the 70s, the ideas "that the essential trait of the Third World was its poverty and that the solution was economic growth and development" became "self-evident, necessary, and universal truths."[25]

For Latin America in particular, which had decolonized earlier than Africa, the discourses of development sought to contend with the growing push for nationalism and autonomy in those countries by opening markets to US investment and consumer products. To achieve this, the logic went, the "right climate" had to be created, including "a commitment to capitalist development; the curbing of nationalism; and the control of the Left, the working class, and the peasantry." Development, then, sought and created "abnormalities"—the underdeveloped, the Third World—and "fixed" them "in one single feat of Western rationality." Escobar admits that the creation of the three worlds system and the problematization of poverty are inextricably enmeshed with race, but does not explore *how*, privileging class divisions instead. My work will take Escobar's interventions into the discourse of development further, questioning the place of race within Panamanian historical institutions.

In Panama, the discourse of development is expressed through a historical narrative that dichotomizes the backwards black subject to the developed white subject. David Theo Goldberg in his seminal 1993 work Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning gives an account of how "we have come, if often only silently, to conceive of social subjects foremost in racial terms" through the institutions of

[24] Ibid, 23.
[25] Ibid, 24.

modernity.[26] These subjects are created through "in large part thinking (of) oneself in terms of—literally *as*—the image projected in prevailing concepts of the discursive order."[27] Goldberg's definition of modernity is closely tied to a Western-centric notion of development: "The spirit of modernity is to be found most centrally in its commitment to continuous progress: to material, moral, physical and political improvement and to the promotion and development of civilization, the general standards for which the West took to be its own values universalized."[28]

Racism and racialization, he argues, are "conceptually bound and sustained" by the project of modernity. However, this central aspect of modernity is generally silenced—"It is denied just as it maps the countours internal to and bordering the postcolonial, postcommunist, postmodern, postapartheid, and increasingly transnational era."[29] Goldberg is interested in how these racial knowledges become a Gramscian "common sense," unquestioned, generally silent, and pervasive. Goldberg's work helps place race centrally in discourses of development in Panama, particularly in its silent but pervasive expressions, and connect these discourses to notions of modern "progress" that are embedded in the historical narratives of Panamanian institutions.

Appadurai continues on the instrumental use of the past, explaining that

> "States…are everywhere seeking to monopolize the moral resources of community, either by flatly claiming perfect coevality between nation and state, or by systematically museumizing and representing all the groups within them in a variety of heritage politics that seems remarkably uniform throughout the world (Handler 1988; McQueen 1988)"

[26] Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 1.
[27] Ibid, 2.
[28] Ibid, 4.
[29] Ibid, 8.

Appadurai helps us see how the narratives that states promote become dominant through the use of historical heritage politics. The narrative techniques of large, government-funded development projects in Panama utilize a variety of "heritage politics" to appease the many critics of their political, social, economic and ecological policies. These historical representations claim "perfect coevality" with the nation in order to promote a vision of development and thriving business interests. Through this, these institutions systematically attempt to contain the disrupting discourse of black participation in the Canal itself and as citizens in contemporary Panama.

HYBRID MODERNITY

As dominant as it has become, the discourse of development in Panama is nevertheless articulated in complex and often contradictory ways throughout these museums. In a 1997 response to his landmark work, Hybrid Culture: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity, Argentinian anthropologist Nestor Garcia Canclini explains that:

> "The history of how our [Latin American] exuberant modernism is articulated - that is the intellectual projects of modernity based on deficient socio-economic modernisation - is the story of how the elites, and in many cases the popular sectors, have ingeniously hybridised the desired modernity with traditions that they do not want to cast away, in order to take charge of our multitemporal heterogeneity and to turn it into something productive."[30]

[30] Nestor Garcia Canclini, "Hybrid Cultures and Communicative Strategies," *Media Development* 44, no. 1 (1997), accessed April 8, 2012, http://www.waccglobal.org/en/19971-cultural-boundaries-identity-and-communication-in-latin-america/940-Hybrid-Cultures-and-Communicative-Strategies.html

Garcia-Canclini sought to study Latin American nation-states in transition; nation-states that were actively creating and supporting projects of modernity and national culture in the 1980s. He sees these projects of modernization as intimately tied to notions of development and the market, as well as to establishing cultural capital. He studies how Latin American nation-states, such as Argentina, legitimated inequality through the use of historical patrimony in their modernization projects.

Garcia-Canclini helps us understand modernity not merely as an imposition of the strong or dominant on the weak, but as a web of transactions and relationships between subjects, a multipolarity of "reciprocal borrowing".[31] Garcia-Canclini's Gramscian understanding of the obliqueness of power and resistance informs my work on Panamanian historical institutions, and in particular the West Indian Museum of Panama. Like Garcia-Canclini describes in his work, the discourse of these museums Panama is only somewhat based on Western techno-economic models (some more than others). It is in fact articulated as a hybrid of these modernities with significant traditions. Hybridity does *not* mean that race loses its explanatory power in a capacious and rhizomic modernity. Instead, it is a means of articulation that expresses the overdetermination of race within this particular context.[32] Garcia-Canclini points to how this articulation is *productive*—not merely a practice of resistance or acculturation, but a site of memory and history making. Following his work, I see these museums as hybrid sites of history-making, influenced by the discourse of development that has become a dominant project

[31] Ibid.

[32] See Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structure in Dominance," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

among Panamanian institutions and the state, pressures from the West Indian community, and the growing tourism industry.

METHODOLOGY

I will explore the institutional discourse of three cultural projects in Panama: the Panama Canal Authority (ACP), the Museo del Canal Interoceánico (Interoceanic Canal Museum), and the West Indian Museum. I will first focus on the ACP, the main governing body of the Canal, and its publicity efforts around the 2006 referendum for the Canal expansion. My primary sources will be official pamphlets and proposals that the ACP published and distributed in Panama newspapers around this time. I will also analyze the museum exhibitions at the Miraflores Locks, the main tourist attraction of the Canal Zone, which recently added a new floor to its exhibition halls focusing on the expansion. I analyze the "progressive" historical narratives espoused by the ACP in support of its powerful economic interests that positions black Panamanian men as unassimilated and backwards "Others" who require development.

I will also look at the efforts of "cultural development" by the Interoceanic Canal Museum. My sources will be the museum exhibitions, the museum website, and an interview with the museum Director, Dr. Angeles Ramos Baquero, conducted in August 2011. I will also do a case study of the museum's application for UNESCO's Memory of the World Program with historical photographs of West Indian life during the Canal construction. Though development was not conceived as a cultural process, but as a

"system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions,"[33] this notion of cultural development is useful in studying newer brands of development. In Panama, cultural development speaks to the vision of these institutions of the nation as a cultural player in the global sphere—world-class museums that seek to "elevate the cultural level of our community" and a nationalistic goal of "revindicat[ing] the protagonism of Panama in its own history."[34]

Lastly, I will look at the West Indian Museum, located in the historically black neighborhood of Calidonia. My sources will be the permanent museum exhibitions, the temporary photography exhibition set up during August 2011, the tour provided by the on-site guide and the official newsletter of its funding organization. The West Indian Museum provides a space of counter-memory and counter-narratives to the other powerful Panamanian institutions. Though this Museum does not seek to promote development in the same way other projects do, it does support community initiatives to improve living and political conditions for West Indians in Panama. The representation of black work and culture in this museum subverts the historical narrative of progress in which the Panama Canal Authority and the Interoceanic Canal Museum are so invested, even as it itself invests in the popular discourses of development and economic growth through globalization.

Each of these is both a museum and a large-scale cultural project—the Panama Canal Authority publishes pamphlets and advertising, the Interoceanic Canal Museum touts community development as its mission, and the West Indian Museum organizes

[33] Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 44.
[34] Dr. Angeles Ramos Baquero in personal conversation with author, August 2011.

frequent community events. In each case study, I move between the museum representation and the projects they promote as a critical tourist, reading both the experiential aspects of visiting these sites and critically analyzing the discourse of their public materials.

This is certainly not a comprehensive account of all the sites of history or development in Panama. The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, for example, is a major force contributing to sustainable development and environmental presentation, and there are many small non-profits working on similar issues. Nevertheless, the first are two of the most powerful and visible cultural institutions in Panama to generate historical narratives and promote national projects. The West Indian Museum, though woefully underfunded, is the focal point of black history-making in Panama City. Other significant sites of memory related to race in Panama include the city of Colón and the region of Bocas del Toro, as well as the Mount Hope Cementery, where most West Indians who worked on the Canal were buried.[35] I did not study these sites due to time constraints, but they would provide a more expansive view of the negotiated historical narratives of black Panamanians.

CONCLUSION

After reversion of Canal ownership from the U.S. to Panama in 1999, the construction of Panamanian national identity became deeply tied to notions of

[35] There is currently a great debate about the Mount Hope Cemetery and the burial of West Indian laborers. For more information, seek "The Silver People Heritage Foundation," an organization hoping to restore the side of the Cemetery where blacks workers were buried. This side has been neglected for many years while the "gold roll" (white) side receives constant upkeep.

development. A deeper analysis of the mobilization of the past by the Panama Canal Authority, the Interoceanic Canal Museum and the West Indian Museum shows how race and raced bodies became the dominant site for the negotiation of Panamanian national identity in the post-Reversion era. Trouillot argues that "[collective subjects'] constitution as subjects goes hand in hand with the continuous creation of the past.[36] The discourses of the past promulgated by important Panamanian institutions in service of national development delineate the possibilities of national subjecthood.

[36] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 16.

Chapter 1: Race and the Discourse of Development in the Panama Canal Authority

The July issue of the monthly Panama Canal Authority corporate magazine *El Faro* exemplifies the workings of race in the discourses of development in Panama. The issue, clearly concerned with a narrative of historical progress, contains only one cover headline, "Two Moments of the Route: the Present and the Future of the Canal." Two black men dominate the publication. The first is José Preciado, the subject of the main story within, titled "Dreams and Perseverance."[37] The article does not explicitly mention his race, but shows a picture of him and uses heavily coded terms to refer to him as a raced body, in particular situating him as a resident of El Chorillo, a well-known black and West Indian "ghetto" in Panama City. The article congratulates Preciado for becoming an appropriate developed subject—rising through the ranks at the Canal Authority, learning English, and generally following the ethos of "sacrifice, hard work and humility." This "puff piece" in the magazine is a thinly veiled advertisement in support of the Canal expansion project, showing that it will provide economic development to the raced, poor bodies of El Chorillo. Preciado is the counterpoint to the other black man in the magazine—the one on the cover. He is unnamed and almost invisible; the picture is uncredited. His body is covered in clothing and his clothes are stained and dirty. Only the bottom half of his face is visible, but he is clearly a black man. He is looking down intently at his work even though the camera is clearly very close to

[37] Maricarmen Sarsanedas, "Sueño y Perseverancia," *El Faro: Revista informative del Canal de Panama*, No. 40 (Panama City, Panama), July 2011, 10-11.

him. This man, the silent laborer, represents the other raced aspect of development strategies—the backbreaking labor of black bodies. Throughout its visual representations, as in this magazine, the Panama Canal Authority attempts to contain black bodies by identifying them as underdeveloped and defining the terms of their development while ignoring the significant contributions of black people to Panama.

In this chapter, I will focus on the Panama Canal Authority (ACP, Autoridad del Canal de Panama), the main governing body of the Canal, and its publicity efforts around the 2006 referendum for the Canal expansion. My primary sources will be official pamphlets and proposals that the ACP published and distributed in Panama newspapers around this time, mainly the comic book "Por Qué Hay que Ampliar."[38] I will also analyze the museum exhibitions at the Miraflores Locks, the main tourist attractions of the Canal funded by the ACP, which recently added a new floor to its exhibition halls focusing on the expansion.

The pamphlets were acquired on a site visit to the National Library of Panama, located within Parque Omar, a large recreational park in the middle of the city. The librarians here read through the daily editions of most of the national newspapers (including *La Prensa*, *La Estrella* and *El Siglo*) and cut out articles that are relevant to certain themes deemed important, one of these being the 2006 Expansion. The pamphlets I use were in a folder under this theme along with the official proposal and articles from various newspapers in support or opposition to the expansion plans. Though the news articles provide an interesting display of the various critiques of development, my focus

[38] Autoridad del Canal de Panama, "Por Qué Hay que Ampliar" (public pamphlet, Panama City, Panama, 2006, accessed in August 2011 at Biblioteca Nacional de Panama).

on this project is the institutional discourse of the Canal expansion, which is why I choose to focus only on the publicity materials published by the ACP. Since I collected these pamphlets at the library archive, there is no information about their distribution. Most likely they were available through national newspapers or at ACP information centers throughout Panama.

I do not argue that the discourse of development in all of these materials is constantly obsessed with race. In fact, most materials about the Canal expansion are concerned with economics, with no mention of social or human factors. This is why my sample size of pamphlets is small—most publicity materials had a purely economic focus. Though these materials do not necessarily express a concern with race, they do promote the general idea of development as a "common sense" and unquestionably positive concept. This process erases the historicity of development as a discourse that, as Escobar explained, was always intimately tied to questions of poverty, race, social control, and empire.[39] Given that, the materials I look at that *do* address social, human or historical factors always struggle with the position of the black subject within these narratives of development.

My discussion on the Miraflores Visitors Center and its exhibitions comes from two site visits during August 2011. During these visits, I toured all three floors of the museum, taking pictures of the exhibits, reading all written materials, watching every video thoroughly, and using the interactive modules. The third floor exhibit, the "Canal in Action" Hall, was closed during this month and is currently under construction for future

[39] Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: the making and unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

re-opening. I also observed the external areas of the Visitor Center, including the observation deck and gift shop, and watched a short film shown in the Center Theater titled "The Panama Canal: An Adventure in the Heart of the Americas."[40]

PRODUCTION FETISHIM AND ANACHRONISTIC SPACE

Part of the nationalistic fervor surrounding the Canal takeover and the new expansion project can be understood through Appadurai's idea of production fetishism: "The locality (both in the sense of the local factory or site of production and in the extended sense of the nation-state) becomes a fetish that disguises the globally dispersed forces that actually drive the production process." This focus on the local-national in Panama is a coherent project by the Panamanian state and its institutions to promote their business development with the Canal. All the publicity materials and tourist attractions developed by the Panama Canal Authority exaggerate their Panamanian nationalism. In this way, the "globally dispersed forces" that contribute/d to the Canal project, such as West Indian people, are erased behind a nationalistic fetish, subsumed to the Panamanian nation. The American, European and Asian powers that encourage and finance Canal development projects and their economic interests in the region are also hidden behind this locality.

Also important to understanding the discourse of development mobilized by the ACP is Ann McClintock's idea of "anachronistic space." This term, which she defined in

[40] The video is available in both English and Spanish. I watched only the Spanish version and have translated the title.

her landmark work Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest, describes the use of images of archaic time to justify "imperial progress":

> "Within this trope, the agency of women, the colonized and the industrial working class are disavowed and projected onto anachronistic space: prehistoric, atavistic and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity."[41]

This discursive trope allowed the "threatening heterogeneity of the colonies" to be contained as "*temporally* different and thus as irrevocably superannuated by history."[42] Anachronistic spaces are ahistorical and lack the potential for development—they are perpetually stuck in the same state. Though defined by McClintock to describe the regulatory discourse of the colonial period, this term also applies in this context because development, like colonialism, is constructed as a narrative of historical progress. The geographical, cultural and social closeness of blackness to the ideal white Panamanian nation must be similarly contained by placing black subjects as permanently underdeveloped. As in the Victorian era, the museum continues to function as "an exemplary institution for embodying the [Victorian] narrative of progress"[43] in this contemporary Panamanian context.

These two related forces—the fetishization of locality and the use of anachronistic space—compose the discourse of development promoted by the ACP. In this way, the ACP can identify black and other people of color as backwards subjects that require development. At the same time, their museum and publicity materials hide many of the forces that converge on the Canal behind a limiting and fetishized definition of the

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[41] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 40.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

nation. People of color are thus constructed in discourse as backwards and requiring of development, but never part of the future conception of development. They are not included in the ACP's vision of the Panamanian nation.

"NO ME QUIERO QUEDAR": DISCOURSES OF RACE DURING THE 2006 REFERENDUM

The Panama Canal Authority became the governing body of the Canal after control of it was transferred from US to Panamanian hands. It is organized under the Organic Law of the Panama Canal Authority, which passed on June 11, 1997 in preparation for the exchange. The ACP is run by a Board of Directors and is the biggest private corporation in Panama. It is currently headed by Chairman of the Board Romulo Roux, partner of one of the biggest law firms in the nation, Morgan & Morgan, which deals mainly with corporate and banking law for its many international clients. The position of Chair is designated by the President of Panama and is also assigned a powerful position as Minister of State for Canal Affairs.[44] Though the ACP operates as a private institution, it holds many ties to the State. The 2006 referendum was the biggest endeavor of the new Canal administration. The ACP had to prove that the Canal could be profitable and modern outside of American leadership. Thus, the publicity materials seek not only to convince people of the expansion, but to convince them of the central and patriotic role of the Panama Canal Authority within the nation.

The Canal expansion project, proposed in April 2006, sought to add a third set of locks to the existing infrastructure to address the larger size of transport ships and

[44] For information on the ACP, see Autoridad del Canal de Panama, "Sobre ACP," accessed April 7, 2012, http://www.pancanal.com/esp/acp/index.html

increased transit of the Canal in recent times. According to the official proposal, published on April 25, 2006, the expansion project would fill the nation's coffers, increase the competitiveness of Panama in the global economy, enlarge Canal capacity to address growing demand, and make the Canal more productive, efficient and safe, eventually "impulsing the whole of the national economy and increasing the quality of life of every Panamanian."[45] The proposed third set of locks would also require major ecological restructuring of the area, moving massive amounts of soil, possibly displacing people, and redirecting water sources.

The proposed expansion was immediately controversial. Many believed in the need for expansion, but critics cited widespread corruption and corporate greed, the huge cost of the project, and the ecological impact.[46] The Panama Canal Authority launched a large publicity campaign to encourage Panamanians to vote "Sí" at the referendum, including information centers throughout the country, massive newspapers ads and billboards, TV commercials and distributed pamphlets. In the official proposal, as in every other publicity material related to the expansion, the main argument was national development, including economic growth, more jobs, increased exports, and the chance to launch Panama into the "First World." Many also cited international competition to build a new waterway in Nicaragua or Mexico.

I started my Introduction with a consideration of "Por Qué Hay que Ampliar," a publicity pamphlet published by the Panama Canal Authority to convince voters to

[45] Autoridad del Canal de Panama, "Propuesta de Ampliacion del Canal de Panama: Proyecto del Tercer Juego de Esclusas" (public proposal, Panama City, Panama, April 25, 2006), 2

[46] See, for example, Olmedo Beluche, "Semblanzas: Exigimos rechazo y voto no a la propuesta de ampliación," *Panama America* (Panama City, Panama), August 13, 2006. Beluche presented this text to the National Assembly during the debates to approve the expansion.

approve the referendum.[47] It takes the form of a conversation between two characters, one black man and one white man, in a comic strip. The white man, driving a bus named "Progress," stops to help the black man's broken down taxi cab called "Atraso" (regression, or backwards progress). The white man proceeds to tell the black man of the benefits of the Canal expansion, answering his many doubts. The black man is finally convinced and jumps on the Progress bus yelling "No me quiero quedar" (I don't want to stay/be left behind). As I argued earlier, the comic strip situates blackness in a position of pastness and associates development with whiteness. The racial-temporal contrast between the black man and the white man attempts to justify this new plan of development. Moreover, the characterization of the two men implies further complications for the black man as an "underdeveloped" denizen of the Panamanian nation.

None of the figures are colored in and so, skin color is the white of the printed paper. Nevertheless, the black man is characterized as such by thick lips and a wide nose (Figure 1). These particular physical characteristics are tropes used in drawn depictions of black people to emphasize the perceived physical reality of race. Moreover, the black man is shown wearing a backwards cap and sneakers which associates him to an urban, lower-class social position. It also somewhat attaches him to a "foreign" presence, a sort of American-infused black urban style.

The white man, on the other hand, wears a hat called a *pinta'o*, as well as peasant sandals and torn pants, that denotes him as someone from a rural area. He is supposed to

[47] Autoridad del Canal de Panama, "Por Qué Hay que Ampliar."

be read as a lower-class rural white man. To a Panamanian, however, he is more than that. The white man's dress represents a traditional symbol of Panamanian manhood. He is dressed in the style of a "manito," a man from the province of Ocú, where the most important national folkloric festival in Panama takes place. The National Festival of Manito in Ocú celebrates the life, labor and traditions of rural peoples of this area during the second week of August of every year. The festival, or variations of it, has been celebrated in Ocú since before Panamanian independence and was named Manito in the 1960s. It wasn't until December 1999, however, around the same time of the Reversion, that the event was made official as a National Folkloric Festival of the Republic of Panama by Law 53. Though the black man's attire is more generic, the white cartoon man exemplifies the manito type (see Figure 2 as an example from the festival).

Similar to the peasant *jíbaro* of Puerto Rico, the manito represents many contradictory aspects of the Panamanian nation and manito discourse is often mobilized in service of national unity.[48] The manito, and his female counterpart, la pollera, always take part in folkloric demonstrations around Panama. The white man in this cartoon stands in for the most "authentic" type of Panamanian man that exists. Support for progress, then, is not just a choice, but a national tradition and a proof of manhood. The black skeptic, on the other hand, is shown to be wavering in his loyalty to the nation. His vaguely Americanized style, contrasted with the "true" ethnic Panamanian man, dismisses the critiques of the vestiges of American colonial presence within the Canal

[48] See Lilian Guerra, "The Jíbaro—Refuge of the Puerto Rican Soul: Elite Discourses of Nostalgia, Incorporation and Betrayal," in *Popular Expression and National Identity in Puerto Rico: The Struggle for Self, Community and Nation* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1998), 67-121 and Nathaniel L. Cordova, "In his image and likeness: The Puerto Rican jíbaro as political icon," *Centro Journal* xvii, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 170-191.

authority that had plagued the new administration. The choice of these characterizations implies that the black man choosing to board the "Progress" bus is thereby seeking admittance into the Panamanian nation.

The men are also portrayed as lower-class by their speech—in the first page alone, they use several slang terms such as "compa" (a short version of compadre, meaning compatriot or fellow), "pilla" (check it out) and "pritty" (a Spanglish version of pretty). This allows the men to have a common ground—they speak the same language, forging a working-class solidarity in support of their perceived better future. This choice also places them both on the same level, echoing the promise for a more egalitarian society that much of the referendum publicity promoted. Nevertheless, their racial characterization places them on unequal ground. The choice of the names of their respective vehicles clearly shows the white man already in control and ownership of a forward-moving "Progress," while the black man is stuck (his car is literally broken down) in the past of "Atraso." In the racialized timeline presented here, the black man exists in an anachronistic space of backwardness among the already developed white citizens of Panama.

The interactions between the two men consist of the white man explaining the pros of the Canal expansion, while the black man functions as a foil. The black man is positioned as an unknowing fool, who lacks knowledge about the possibilities of development and has clearly failed to "develop" his personal business. His questions always lead to a positive response in support of the expansion and the ACP, making his white counterpart look knowledgeable and prepared by comparison. The black man is

also quick to anger in contrast with the calm and collected white man, portrayed again as having an irrational and uncivilized nature.. When the white man first arrives on the scene, cheerily offering his help, the black man is fuming next to his broken down car. Some panels later, the black man is drawn in an angry stance, with clenched fists and a snarl (Figure 3). He is upset about the possibility of corruption during the building process, a pressing concern in the Panamanian public sphere, and ask whether there will be any safeguards against it. The white man responds that "Law 28" will prevent corruption and beside him appears an embodiment of this law—a white, broad-shouldered, muscled American-style superhero with the number 28 on his chest. The white man's calm response and the presence of the strong white embodiment of law towering over them assuages the black man's rage. This white superhero represents the protection law, but it also shows an ideal of development that relies on Western, white popular notions.[49] There is also a displacement of the violence of the development process here by positioning the rage within the questioning black man, instead of the towering muscles of the white law. That way, both blackness and concerns about the expansion are portrayed as irrational, violent and unpatriotic.

The white man functions as the information giver—he represents the Panama Canal Authority and has deep knowledge of the expansion project and its pros. This means that, since the pamphlet is supposed to convince, the point of identification for the reader is meant to be the black cab driver. He, like the presumed reader, is ignorant or skeptical of the project, and has many of the same concerns. This characterization of the

[49] Escobar, *Encountering Development*.

figures seems to imply that the intended audience for this cartoon was itself a lower-class and possibly black audience.

At the end of the cartoon story, the black man jumps into the bus yelling "No me quiero quedar" (I don't want to stay behind). Both men ride off on the Progress bus into a sunset, and the text on the panel says "This will be our great opportunity, unique, irreplaceable and historic!" Meanwhile, the black man has lost his source of independent income by deserting his taxicab, which disappears after the first page, in order to board the Progress bus. In some sense, the cartoon provides the black man with potential for development, as he does board the bus. But his future is left ambiguous—his development only means riding off into the sunset and does not translate into a visual representation of his "future" state. Moreover, since the white man is already "progressed," what exactly does this bus trip mean for the now joining black man?

The very last page of the pamphlet contains a traditional advertisement for the Canal expansion. It shows a picture of a young black child being examined by a doctor with a white coat and a stethoscope. The tagline above the picture says "With the Canal, we all grow/develop." This reiterates the attempted argument of the cartoon that the expansion will greatly benefit those in lower classes and produce a more egalitarian society. But the use of the black child also reiterates the idea that it is black subjects who require development.

The referendum was held on October 26, 2006. The ballot asked "Do you approve the proposal of construction of a Third Set of Locks on the Panama Canal?" An overwhelming majority of 76.83% voted "SI" to expand the Canal. However, the

referendum was marked with a large degree of absenteeism for Panamanian elections, as only 43.32% of registered voters participated.[50] At the end, the massive publicity campaigns did not inspire the public to rally around the idea of nationalist development that the ACP promoted. Though the vote has already passed and expansion is underway, similar discourses of race and development continue to be propagated by the main public institution of the ACP, the Miraflores Visitors Center.

THE MIRAFLORES VISITORS CENTER

The Miraflores Visitors Center is located on the east side of the Miraflores Locks where boats are lifted and lowered to transit the Canal. Most visitors go for the experience of watching the ships travel through the locks from the top deck of the center, which takes about 30 minutes. Along with the observation area, the ever-present tourist gift shop, snack bar and restaurant, the visitor's center also includes four exhibition halls: the History Hall, the Water Hall, the "Canal in Action" Hall (currently under renovation), and the new "Canal in the World" Hall. In comparison to the observation deck, the museum is relatively empty of visitors—clearly the Canal itself as a technological wonder is the draw of the Miraflores Locks. In fact, the Miraflores Visitors Center is *not* a self-prescribed historical museum, but a tourist attraction that provides information about the Canal to capitalize on tourist visits to the site and (less so) to educate the Panamanian public.

[50] Mónica Palm, "Se impuso la voluntad popular: Torrijos," *La Prensa* (Panama City, Panama), Oct. 26, 2006, http://mensual.prensa.com/mensual/contenido/2006/10/26/hoy/panorama/778183.html

The History Hall gives a cursory overview of the Canal construction, from the first "discovery" of the Canal to the end of the American construction. The Hall begins with a drawn panel depicting a succinct timeline of early conceptions of the Canal's potential, including Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, Charles I of Spain, the American Gold Rush and Railroad, and finally, the French surveys that finally "recognized the isthmus." This entry panel sets the stage for an unquestioned and glorifying history of the colonial relationships that have marked Panama since its "discovery" by Christopher Columbus.

The room, though it is the entrance to the museum, is quite dark and has clearly not been renovated since it was first opened. Unlike newer parts of the museum and other ACP publicity, this hall does not contain a nationalistic focus, nor does it claim the Panamanian nation as builder or owner of the Canal. The hall provides very little historical information, scant amounts of text or documents, and few pictures. The only portraits are of Ferdinand de Lesseps, lead French engineer, and Philippe Bunau-Varilla, also a French engineer as well as orchestrator of Panamanian independence from Colombia and its deal with the U.S. The entry area focuses on the French era, with a small reconstruction of a French-inspired Panamanian balcony, pictures of the construction, some bricks and a dump cart, as well as a statue of De Lesseps with surveying equipment.

Strangely, there are no depictions of American leaders or engineers. The American construction is not named as a historical moment, like the "French era" is in the previous section. The construction of the Canal is instead represented by a series of models of ships, railroads and Canal technology. In this way, the American construction

is not denoted as an era, but just subsumed under a general history of the Canal. The overwhelming sensation throughout is of violence, highlighted in particular by the loud, repeated explosion noise coming from a picture slideshow depicting various rock blasts necessary for building the Canal.

Black men appear in a few of the photographs of the French period as faceless background laborers. Some of these photographs, though uncited, are images taken by Ernest Hallen, Official Photographer of the (American) Ishtmian Canal Commission. As his was a process of industrial documentation, the pictures highlight labor and technology, not people.[51] But black laborers are highlighted at the end of the History Hall. The last section "honors the hundreds of men and women who made this achievement possible"[52] with two features: two statues of black workers (Figure 4) and a wall of photographs with the text of "Canal heroes". Unlike the other statues in the hall, such as the one of French Canal director Ferdinand De Lesseps, the statues of the black workers are unnamed. They represent the every(black)man who labored to build the Canal.

This area does explicitly address the contributions of West Indians to the construction of the Canal, in a text panel titled "Canal Heroes" that explains "Most came from Barbados, but also from Martinique, Guadalupe, Trinidad and Jamaica…They managed to understand each other, started families, made fortunes, and exalted the country." But though they receive some praise and connection to the nation ("exalted the

[51] For a collection of these images, see Ulrich Keller, *The Building of the Panama Canal in Historic Photographs* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1983).
[52] Autoridad del Canal de Panama, "Miraflores Visitors Center: A window to the Canal" (pamphlet, Panama City, Panama, acquired on August 15, 2011, no date of publication).

country"), the statues next to the text once again limit the potential polivocality of this historical narrative. Like the black man in the comic book, the statues do not have painted "black" skin (they are all the color brown, including the statues of the white men earlier). Instead, they are denoted as black by thick lips, wide noses, curly hair, and their laboring actions. Like Jose Preciado in the magazine, they are praised for following the "right" values of perseverance, effort, sacrifice and hope which are written in a text panel next to them. And like the black man on the cover, their labor is presented as necessary but made anonymous and silent. This tableau of black laborers serves to cement their static position in a historical past and contain them within a pre-determined mode of development that privileges these capitalist values of striving.

The second hall, titled "Water: Fountain of Life," focuses on water preservation and biodiversity as two important goals of the Canal complex. The exhibition is tonally different from the History Hall below—it feels like an aquarium, with fish tanks and bug exhibits in a softly lit room. The few explanatory panels opt for a positive view of the contributions of the Canal project to energy efficiency and water distribution, while eliding the severe ecological and socioeconomic manipulations of the Canal basin. This Hall, like the History Hall, continues to glorify the technological achievements of Canal development. The only information panel that addresses the human element, titled "Major Socio-Cultural Groups in the Panama Canal Watershed," states "the major sociocultural groups in the Panama Canal Watershed include the Embera and Wouman

native tribes, and black and mestizo farmers."[53] Whites, it seems, are not a sociocultural group of the area—that is to say, they are not considered "cultural," but developed and urban. The people of color are part of the natural landscape, aided and elevated by the presence of Canal technology.

The panel represents these "cultural groups" mostly through pictures of children. All of the pictures place their subjects outdoors. In this way, people of color are associated with a primitive, naturalistic, and backwards lifestyle, while whites become the developed "everyman" that has constructed the Canal structures exhibited in the other halls. The use of the word "sociocultural" to describe these people implies a white ethnographic eye examining these groups. The very act of exhibiting them in this manner places them in an anachronistic space, or as "prehistoric, atavistic, and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity."[54] Black and indigeneous people in Panama, this panel seems to say, survive in a temporally different space from the fast-moving and developed white Panama. They exist on a plane equivalent to insects and fish.

The "Canal in the World" Hall, on the last floor of the Miraflores Visitors Center looks like a completely different museum. The hall is brightly lit and upbeat electronic music from the various flashy videos playing wafts through the room. This hall was added to address the expansion and 2006 referendum, as well as to update the museum with a positive depiction of the ACP's role in furthering Panama's development. In this

[53] "Major Socio-Cultural Groups in the Panama Canal Watershed," Miraflores Locks Visitors Center, Water Hall (Panama City, Panama), visited on August 15, 2011.
[54] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 40.

last hall, there are virtually no representations of black or indigenous people. In fact, there are few people overall, since most of the exhibit consists of machine parts, videos, and some documents from the referendum. It is instead concerned with telling a "new" story of Panama that culminates in the expansion as the peak of development. The main video of the Hall is titled "The Story Written by Panama," and it divides this story in seven parts:

1. the Hay Bunau-Varilla Treaty of 1903,
2. the 1964 Martyrs (student protest),
3. the Torrijos-Carter Treaties of 1977,
4. the 1999 Transfer,
5. the 2002 Canal Tolls Policy Change,
6. the 2006 Referendum, and finally,
7. the beginning of the "works for expansion of the Canal waterway" in 2007

This story highlights the triumphs of Panamanian ownership in a nationalistic retelling. The Hay Buneau Varilla Treaty, though a contentious event, is positioned as the beginning of the Panamanian nation. The construction and intervening years are passed over, disguising the global nature of the Canal project, both its neo-colonial ties to the US and the many black foreign workers who arrived and settled in Panama. The next moment is one of political engagement, portrayed as a time when Panamanians reclaimed the Canal as their own. As with the first floor, where the American construction period is elided over, this video privileges the creation of Panama as a nation through its interactions with the Canal.

The story then becomes streamlined to be only about the transfer of the Canal. The last four moments come in quick succession, showing the accomplishments of the ACP (used as metonymy for the Panamanian nation) since they gained control of the Canal. The video ends in a set of images that parallel those in the History Hall—a series of huge explosions that raze the landscape to make way for progress.

Unlike the History and Water Halls, where the Panamanian nation is rarely mentioned as such, this last hall places the nation as the protagonist in its own history. The video exemplifies two of the main themes of this museum: the centrality of technology and machinery, and the importance of the powerful white men who crafted the story of Panama (such as Torrijos). In this hall's representation of the Panamanian nation and its history, black and indigenous people are nowhere to be found. Instead, the construction and future of the Panamanian nation are shown as the exclusive realm of the "developed" people of the business and engineering world, assumed to be an unspoken white. The people that need to be brought into this future are the backwards "sociocultural groups" and static black men of the first and second halls. These two older halls function themselves as "anachronistic spaces" for the representation of these "backwards" subjects in comparison to the thoroughly modern and developed last hall.

The nationalistic "fetish" of this video is in tension with the global forces that the rest of the Hall emphasizes. The other large video projected in the exhibit uses the visual techniques of marketing videos to "sell" the importance and modernity of the Canal to the mostly foreign visitors to the Miraflores Locks. Words that describe benefits of the Canal project, like "railroad" and "banking," are superimposed over slick scenes of Canal

functioning and machinery. This again privileges what Escobar would define as a Western style of development—one that is overly focused on a commitment to capitalist development. In this case, however, nationalism serves to promote the cause of development and curb the backwards looking impulses of the working class and the black "non-citizens" of Panama. But though the Hall emphasizes Panamanian exceptionalism and potential by highlighting the nation, it nevertheless uses the visual language of Western style development to convince its viewers.

The Miraflores Visitors Center is one of the most visited tourist sites in Panama. As such, it holds significant power over the representation of Panamanian history and the Canal, including the imperial relationship to the US and the story of working black immigrants who populated Panama in this period. In the Miraflores Visitors Center, the ACP attempts to craft a history that highlights Panamanian triumph and nationalism, equating itself with the nation in its search for increasing economic and technological development. In doing so, the Center obfuscates the corporate links the ACP has with global trade. Moreover, in its historical narrative, the Center places black people (and, to some extent, indigenous people as well) as underdeveloped outsiders who require the benefits of development. Yet black people are not to be found in the Center's conception of a Panamanian future.

CONCLUSION

The Panama Canal Authority is the biggest private corporation in Panama and controls a large economic, cultural and political infrastructure. It has mobilized the discourse of development in its recent plans for Canal expansion by representing a

history of Panama that highlights Panamanian protagonism, but ignores the contemporary place of people of color within this developed nation. Instead, through its publicity materials and museum structure, the ACP has consistently placed black people as a "backwards" or "regressed" group that inhabits an anachronistic space. Though this "backwards" group requires development, black people are never shown creating or receiving it. Instead, development is shown as the success of the powerful combination of the corporate interests and the white Panamanian nation.

Chapter 2: Cultural Development through the Interoceanic Canal Museum

The permanent exhibition on the second floor of the Interoceanic Canal Museum opens with a figure of a black man. He is bent over an early 20th century photographic camera, his head hidden beneath a black cloth. He is dressed simply in a white shirt and black pants. His hands holding the camera are the only evidence of his blackness. The statue is unmarked and the black man unnamed. This decontextualized scene serves as the entry point to the Interoceanic Canal Museum, where powerful national, global, and local memories of the Canal are invested. This statue, with its complicated portrayal of black subjects in Panama, exemplifies the complex workings of race within the museum. Though the museum gives a productive cultural role to black subjects in the Panamanian nation, it also relegates them to the past and erases them from visions of Panama's developed future, promoting instead a future of harmonious mestizaje. The museum functions as a diplomatic tool, the cultural arm of contemporary neo-liberal policies, to portray Panama as a technogically advanced and conflict-free nation.

Unlike the museum in the Miraflores Locks Visitors Center, the Interoceanic Canal Museum makes more concerted efforts to include black West Indians in their representation of the history of Panama. There is a focus on black cultural life in the "Material Life of the Canal Zone" section and the Museum recently submitted a series of historical photographs on the life of West Indian Canal workers to the UNESCO World Heritage Program. However, black Panamanians are excluded from the visions of future development that the Museum presents, both in its exhibitions and its outreach projects.

A look at the history of the museum, its permanent exhibition and its recent efforts of cultural development shows a friction between the discourse of local investment and the privileging of the Museum's international audiences, clients and funders. This is most obvious in the way the museum deals with the black bodies in their historical representation of Panama. Though the museum highlights the role of black people in the construction of the Canal, it nevertheless locates them in a pre-development past. I explore how the Interoceanic Canal Museum seeks to resolve these frictions within a progressive narrative of development, beginning with an idealized mythology of West Indian culture, reinventing the protagonism of Panama, and culminating in whitewashed, global, capitalist development.

I will look at the efforts of "cultural development" by the Interoceanic Canal Museum. Though development was not conceived as a cultural process, but as a "system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions,"[55] the notion of cultural development I use is useful in studying newer brands of development. In Panama, cultural development speaks to the vision of certain institutions of the nation as a cultural player in the global sphere—world-class museums that seek to "elevate the cultural level of our community" and a nationalistic goal of "revindicat[ing] the protagonism of Panama in its own history."[56] I am interested in the discourse the Interoceanic Canal Museum uses to negotiate the global and local pressures that are invested in the museum's representation of Canal history. In thinking of how the "logic of capitalism"

[55] Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: the making and unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 44.
[56] Dr. Angeles Ramos Baquero in personal conversation with author, August 2011.

functions in the advance of globalization, Stuart Hall argues that "capitalism only advances, as it were, on contradictory terrain. It is the contradictions which it has to overcome that produce its own forms of expansion."[57] Similarly, I want to study the contradictions within the Interoceanic Canal Museum in Panama, particularly in its historical representation of raced bodies.

METHODOLOGY

I visited the museum once during a field visit to Panama in December 2010, and twice again in August 2011. My sources will be the museum exhibitions, the museum website, an interview with the museum Director, Dr. Angeles Ramos Baquero, conducted in the same month, and other official documents. I will first discuss the history of the Museum, focusing on the context of its construction and its funding sources, showing its roots as a diplomatic tool and its complicated relationship with the surrounding historically black neighborhood of Casco Viejo. Then, I will discuss "cultural development" through the Museum's website and the interview, as well as a case study of the application for "The Silver Men" document collection into UNESCO's World Heritage Site program.

Lastly, I will focus on the exhibition currently on display at the museum. During the time I visited, the museum was undergoing renovations and the first floor "main" exhibition was closed. I will thus discuss this first section only peripherally, using an

[57] Stuart Hall, "The Local and The Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," in *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 29.

extensive catalog titled "La Ruta, La Gente, El Agua" published by the Banco General of Panama in conjunction with the Museum. The second floor of the museum, which serves as their current permanent collection, will provide my central point of analysis. This section begins with a cultural history of the construction period, and goes on to discuss important historical events related to the Canal such as the 1964 Flag Riots and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties. The Interoceanic Canal Museum has recently added a small new section on the expansion, which I will turn to last. The museum did not allow photography or recording and thus, my analysis will stem mainly from field notes taken during my visits and publicity materials on their exhibits published by the museum itself.

My interest in this museum is to analyze how dominant hegemony incorporates and recombines resistant discourses. As the workings of modernity become more complex, when it is difficult "giving race explanatory power once it has been established that race operates differently in different contexts,"[58] I seek to relocate racism and race as essential structures of modern discourses of development. The Interoceanic Canal Museum is one of the major projects of Panamanian national reidentification. Its representation of black West Indian subjects shows the racial conflicts of this project and the continued silencing of race in discourses of modernity.

[58] Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas, "Introduction: Globalization and the Transformation of Race," in *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*, Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 2.

BUILDING HISTORY AND MUSEUM CONSTRUCTION

The Interoceanic Canal Museum occupies a building that is closely linked to the history of the Canal. It was built in 1875 during the French Canal Construction as the Grand Hotel. In 1881, it was sold to the Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interoceanique, the main administrative body of the French construction initiative, to install its main office. After the failure of the French Canal, the building passed to U.S. ownership and the Isthmian Canal Commission was housed there until 1910. It then became property of the Panamanian government and housed various federal agencies, most recently the National Postal and Telegraphic Services Bureau.[59]

The Museum sits on the main square of Panama City, Plaza Catedral, in the old quarter of the city called San Felipe, or Casco Viejo. Plaza Catedral is also called Plaza de la Independencia (Independence Square) and is marked as the site where Panama celebrated its independence from Colombia in 1903 (the same year the US began construction on the Canal). On the same square are the main cathedral and the Municipal Palace, which also houses the small City Museum and the Academy of History. This square is one of the main tourist attractions of the city, with many hotels and upscale restaurants. The neighborhood was named a Historic District under Law 91 in 1976, in a move towards celebrating moments of Panamanian history around the time of the Torrijos-Carter treaties. The Panamanian government has sponsored several revitalization plans in this area, most recently in 1995, with funding from the Inter-American

[59] R. Rodriguez, "El museo del Canal Interoceanico de Panama: breve reseña de su gestión, metas y proyecciones," *Revista Loteria* 412 (May-June 1997): 49-59.

Development Bank.[60] This plan included an application to the UNESCO World Heritage Site list, which finally accepted Casco Viejo to their list in 1997. This initial 1995 plan included the first official proposal for a Canal Museum.

San Felipe (or Casco Viejo) began as the upper-class enclave of New Panama in the 18th and 19th centuries.[61] During this time, white elites lived within the city walls, while mostly black inhabitants lived *extramuros*. Beginning in the twentieth century, however, this racial dynamic began to shift. Upper-class white Panamanians moved out of the city center, further east along the bay into neighborhoods like contemporary Bella Vista.[62] Migrant workers, many West Indians, and working class families moved into the neighborhood, usually into tenement housing.[63] By the late 1920's, the area had fallen into disrepair, due to its isolation from what had become the business and commercial center of Panama. Since the 1995 revitalization plan, however, the area has become increasingly attractive for international investors who have started a trend of gentrification. Upscale restaurants, cafes, boutiques, art galleries and hotels now sit next to still decaying homes, inhabited by mostly black families.

This increased gentrification occurred around the time of the reversion of the Canal from U.S. to Panamanian ownership. In the years preceding the planned reversion, international media sources voiced constant concerns about the capability of

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[60] V. Spadafora and Eduardo Tejeira Davis , eds., *Panama City's Old Quarter* (Panama City, Panama: CiudadCity Publishers, 2001).

[61] "Old Panama" refers to the older site of the city, much further north than the current center, Casco Viejo. It is currently a museum and archaeological site. Old Panama was vulnerable to constant pirate attacks and thus, "New" Panama was built in a more defensible position with a large wall.

[62] Ana Luisa Sanchez Laws, *Panamanian Museums and Historical Memory* (London: Museum of London and Berghahn Books, 2011), 19.

[63] Ibid, 74.

Panamanians to take charge of the Canal. Panamanian President Ernesto Balladares organized the World Congress of the Interoceanic Canal to address these mounting concerns and pressure from the international commerce community. Ana Luisa Sanchez Laws argues that this event echoes two other such global meetings: the 1879 *Congres Internationale d'études du Canal Interocéanique* in Paris, where the first decision to build a Canal was proposed, and the signing of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties, which happened on the same exact day, twenty years earlier.[64] The creation of the Canal Museum in this context, served to establish the turnover as "part of a necessary historical transition" and to justify Panama's ownership of the Canal due to their deep historical roots with it.[65] Even from this nascent moment, the Museum was billed as itself a global venture—a research center that would mollify the international community and represent its interests. It was inaugurated as the Museum of the Interoceanic Canal on September 7, 1997 in commemoration of the World Congress.

Unlike most of the museums in Panama, the Interoceanic Canal Museum is not under the purview of the National Institute of Culture. Though it is partially funded through government sources, the Museum is run by a non-profit organization, the Patronato del Museo del Canal Interoceanico. This organization receives a mix of public and private sector funding. Some of these sources include the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Culture, the President's Office, the European Union, the French and American Embassies of Panama, the Smithsonian Institute and the Panama Canal Authority, showing its wide international support. Furthermore, of all the museums in the

[64] Ibid, 76.
[65] Ibid.

country, it is the only member of the International Council of Museums and the American Association of Museums.

But regardless of its international origins and funding, the Museum administration and public relations insists on a mission of Panamanian protagonism from the perspective of Panamanians. The museum exists between this desire, in conjunction with the growing nationalism following the 1999 reversion, and the motto of global service that Panama has had since the days of the Canal construction, *Pro Mundi Beneficio* (For the Benefit of the World). Black bodies are the arena where these contradictions play out through the museum's recent efforts at cultural development and its exhibitions.

THE MISSION OF CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Museum's Mission Statement reads:

> The Interoceanic Canal Museum of Panama is a permanent non-profit institution, at the service of society and its development, open to the public; that acquires, conserves, researches, interprets, diffuses and exhibits the historical testimonies of the Panama Canal, for the education, knowledge and delight of the public that visits. Through the careful selection, acquisition, and exhibition of object and materials related to the history, construction, technology and functioning of the Panama Canal, the Interoceanic Canal Museum will fulfill its objectives of collecting, conserve, safekeep, divulge and research related themes. Similarly, it will contribute to elevating the cultural level of our community, enhancing initiatives and activities that will result in the common good.[66]

From the beginning of their statement, the museum makes clear their main objective in service of development. Throughout, it seems like this mission is to be achieved through

[66] "Misión y Metas," Museo del Canal Interoceánico de Panamá, accessed April 18, 2012, http://www.museodelcanal.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1&Itemid=3. Translated by author.

the representation of historical artifacts and exhibitions about the Canal construction that will educate the public and elevate their knowledge. The end of the statement refers specifically to their mission of cultural development. In their definition, culture is progressive quality, that is, people can become "more" cultured, reach a "higher" cultural "level." The statement does not specify what "community" they are referring to, and herein lies the slippage. The immediate neighborhood community of the Museum, Casco Viejo, is predominantly black but has become a poster area for development because of increased international investment. The Museum's mission of "cultural development" is intimately tied to increasing international investment in the immediate area, which is displacing their black neighbors.

As their mission states their commitment to their "community," I asked Dr. Angeles what some of the concrete contributions to their immediate community of Casco Viejo had been. She reiterated the importance of cultural development of the community and equal access to culture. To achieve this, she explained, the Museum has organized approximately 200 temporary exhibits that address current interests in Panamanian society and several cultural weeks of events. Most recently, for example, the Museum had an exhibit about Panamanian theatre director Bruce Quinn and another about French painter Paul Gaughin, who spent some time working on the Panama Canal. Both exhibits emphasize the international nature of their subjects, and the global ties of the Museum and Panama. She freely admits that neither of these qualifies as "community outreach" and that in fact, the Museum has struggled to integrate its surrounding community.

Regarding the museum's mission, assistant curator (and later director of the National Institute of Culture) Reinier Rodríguez said:

> In regards to the public mission of the Museum, it has focused on keeping a constant dialogue between it and the community, especially since it is located in a sector of the city that needs drastic social and cultural changes.[67]

Here we see more explicitly that the community the Museum refers to is in fact their surrounding neighborhood, rather than the national community. In their reiteration of their commitment to cultural development of their "community," the Museum is in fact referring to the need to "raise the cultural level" of the majority black population of Casco Viejo. By Dr. Angeles and Rodriguez' explanations, the Museum attempts to right the wrongs of racism and colonialism in Panama through representation, though not necessarily inclusion. Rodriguez states that the area needs drastic changes, but the actions of the museum emphasize an interest in international community (and economic investment), rather than a "dialogue" with the people who live within San Felipe. Though neither the mission statement nor this interview refer specifically to black or West Indian people, the "community" they refer to, particularly their emphasis on its troubles, implies black bodies. The mission of the Museum itself, then, is caught up in its relationship to the black history and geography that surrounds it.

The most significant project by the Interoceanic Canal Museum dedicated to West Indians in Panama has been the organization and submission of documents related to the history of this community to the UNESCO *Memory of the World* program. This program seeks to preserve documentary heritage, and increase awareness and access to these

[67] Rodriguez, "El museo del Canal Interoceanico de Panama," 56.

collections. Along with museums and organizations from Barbados, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, the United Kingdom and the US, the Canal Museum in Panama submitted to the document collection titled "Silver Men: West Indian Labourers at the Panama Canal."[68] The Museum's specific contribution was a series of 2,186 postcards owned by British collector Charles Muller, showing various scenes of West Indians throughout the construction period. The postcards come from a variety of publishers, such as the famous I.L. Maduro Jr. who, during the construction years, owned a souvenir shop in the same neighborhood where the museum is currently located.

In the nomination form for the program, the organizations justified the preservation of these documents with various reasons, mostly its international significance. One of these was the importance of "Contributions of Afro-descendant community in our culture." The title of this section already creates a separation between "Afro-descendants" and "*our* culture," where "our" means Panamanian, highlighting the racial difference between the mestizo nation and the raced "Otherness" of black West Indians. The section reasons by citing the following three quotes, without added explanation:

> Remarks by Mrs. Dora Perez de Zarate, Folklorist Panamanian referring to the contribution of African descent to our music ... *"a tamborito perhaps darker than common, but tamborito at last, and perhaps if Spinning a little thin, we could even venture the assertion of the possibility that in his drums live the origin of our national dance."* Texts of tamborito, Panamanian work.

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[68] Various authors, "The Silver Men: West Indian Labourers at the Panama Canal," *UNESCO Memory of the World Register: Nomination Form* (2010), accessed April 18, 2012, http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/nomination_forms/Panama%20silvermen.pdf

> Remarks by Julian Caceres Freyre, Argentine anthropologist, to do an analysis of the joy of the Panamanian dances, said in the preface to the work of Zarate: *"... without a doubt is clearly noted the influence of the African contribution, which is what gives the distinctive and makes the folklore of this country (Panama), one of the most interesting in those of Latin America."*
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> On the important contribution of West Indian workers during construction of the Panama Canal, Professor Velma Newton in her book, The Men of the "Silver Roll", cited the praise of Colonel Goethals:
> *"In the construction work, the West Indian workers had a high turnout and a lot of credit…it can truthfully be said that by providing a wide supply of labor, the work is made easier to achieve than it would have been possible without them."*[69]

Though West Indians have contributed a wide array of cultural practices to Panamanian national traditions, the section chooses to focus mainly on a particular type of Panamanian music. The tamborito translates to "Little Drum" and it is the national song and dance of Panama. It is a couples dance accompanied by three drums—a pujador, a repicador, and a caja/tambora—with a female lead singer called a catalante, backed up by a female chorus clapping and singing in call and response form.[70] Women wear the traditional white pollera, while men wear the peasant costume referenced in Chapter 1. The tamborito is considered a *mestizo* tradition, but it borrows heavily from West Indian and African traditions. In fact, black communities in the Caribbean coast of Panama have a similar dance that is called the *congo*, considered different because of its more sexual nature.

The contribution of West Indians to Panama, then, is the folklore of Panama, what makes it distinctive and interesting. In his essay, "Folkloric Others: Blanqueamiento and

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[69] Ibid, 45.
[70] Mark Ellingham, Orla Duane, and James McConnachie, eds., *World Music, The Rough Guide, Vol. 2: Latin and North America, Caribbean, India, Asia and Pacific*, (London: Rough Guides, Penguin Books, 2000), 478.

the Celebration of Blackness as an Exception in Puerto Rico," Isar Godrau explains how discourses of the "folkloric Other" are mobilized in seemingly positive modern projects of urban development.[71] Godreau argues that these discourses of inclusion and celebration complement contemporary discourses of whitening, since it allows a representation of the "black community" as a limited, closed, backwards, romanticized and different group in comparison to the "normal" which is white, modern and adaptable. In this way, the white race is normalized as the principal component of the nation while the repertoire of possible blackness is limited to the "folkloric." In this similar scenario, the blackness of West Indian Panamanians is celebrated in a seemingly positive way. However, the West Indian community is also relegated to the "folkloric" past, in a repetition of raced stereotypes of drums and dancing.

The last quote is from the main Canal engineer, Colonel George Goethals, who praises the contribution of West Indians to the Canal construction. The importance of preserving West Indian memory, then, is measured by its value to significant white international figures such as Col. Goethals. The project of the UNESCO application, at least from the Panamanian contribution, repeats this model of powerful white cultural curators speaking for or illustrating black people (both the collector Charles Mueller, and the curators at the Interoceanic Canal Museum).

Together, these three quotes place the West Indian community of Panama squarely in the past. Their contributions are important as folkloric relics that have been

[71] Isar Godreau, "Folkloric "Others": Blanqueamiento and the Celebration of Blackness as an Exception in Puerto Rico," in *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*, Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 171-187.

subsumed into the larger (and now more culturally diverse) national culture. In the application for UNESCO's Memory of the World project, the Interoceanic Canal Museum of Panama mobilizes a certain West Indian past as a "kind of temporal central casting, to which recourse can be taken as appropriate, depending on the movie to be made, the scene to be enacted, the hostages to be rescued."[72] With this narrative, the Canal places itself as a powerful global institution with growing cultural capital. The museum's mission statement pays lip service to the idea of community development, while also placing black Panamanians as backwards "Others." The project enacted by the Museum through this application relocates racism as an essential part of contemporary discourses—it celebrates black West Indian culture and labor, while decontextualizing their history, in the service of Panamanian development.

THE EXHIBIT

The first floor exhibit, currently under construction, is titled "La Ruta, La Gente, El Agua." According to Dr. Angeles, the new construction will add a bigger focus on ecological and environmental issues, which so far have not been addressed in the museum. This permanent collection began as a temporary exhibition---the very first of the new Canal Museum in 1999. The exhibition was partly organized through a newspaper ad that called for donations of historical items related to the Canal

[72] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 30.

construction.[73] It was funded mainly by the National Institute of Culture, but also by the Panama Canal Authority, the city government, the Ministry of Tourism, and the French and American embassies, showing the diverse and international interests invested in this museum. The catalog for this exhibition states:

> "But the Canal is not only the past, it is also the future. And it is precisely this will to change to be able to face the future which is contained in this last part of this exhibit, dedicated to the constant processes of transformation that the Canal has suffered since the time of its inauguration. Changes marked by the convincing that global commerce depends on the precision and reliability in its functioning. The last section of the exhibition summarizes the good omens that were surmised in a Canal entirely in Panamanian hands that after 1999, will continue to be responsible for accomplishing its vocation of service to the world." [74]

The core purpose of the exhibit is made clear: to prove that Panama will be able to effectively maintain the future of the Canal, and by extension the nation itself, without reliance on foreign forces. The blurb links successful development to the will to change in the future and strong connections with global commerce. It reconstructs the past of the Canal Zone, owned by various international institutions, as a national Panamanian past, where Panama was in control of its role in service to the world. In this sense, Panama's history is written as one of constant upward progress into developed modernity.

This exhibition began with a short section on Pre-Columbian Panama, showing items borrowed from the MARTA (Anthropological Museum Reina Torres de Araúz). The museum rushes through the time prior to the mid-nineteenth century such as the Spanish colonial conquest. Its first large thematic focus is the Gold Rush, the beginning of international attention and commerce in Panama. It then moves through large halls

[73] Dr. Angeles Ramos Baquero in conversation with the author, August 2011.
[74] Team of the Inaugural Exhibition of the Interoceanic Canal Museum of Panama, *La Ruta, La Gente, El Agua* (Panama City, Panama: Banco General, 1997).

devoted to the railroad, the first Canal explorations, the French Canal, and finally, the American Canal construction. A section on the engineering feats of the Canal then jumps several years ahead to the Torrijos-Carter Treaties. The exhibition is built on the moments of international intervention in the Panama Canal, again highlighting Panama's central role in global history and economy. There is little attention paid to human or cultural factors throughout this section.

This blind spot is corrected on the second floor of the museum, which takes a more intimate look at the history of the Canal. The black photographer discussed in the introduction to this chapter kicks off this area, titled "The Material Life of the Canal Zone," but the main focus here is a larger-than-life-size recreation of a famous photograph by official Canal photographer, Ernest Hallen (Figure 5).[75] It shows the interior of the private residence of Division Canal Engineer Colonel Gaillard. The Colonel and his wife, dressed all in white, are having tea on their wicker furniture set. The museum makes no notice of the source of the diorama. This large scene dominates this part of the exhibition hall, reiterating the concern with the lives of white Americans, in particular that of the men in power. The juxtaposition of the black photographer and the white couple shows the conflicting approach to historical representation of race in the museum. The representation of the white couple is substantive, and grounded, as they are named and have prominent faces, whereas the depiction of the black man is decontextualized and genericized, unnamed and hidden beneath a cloth. Moreover, it is highly likely that none of the pictures shown in the museum were taken by a black man—

[75] See full collection in Ulrich Keller, *The Building of the Panama Canal in Historic* Photographs (New York: Dover Publications, 1983).

most are also from Hallen. Thus, the statue of the black photographer seems like a nod towards inclusion, while at the same time displacing real black cultural labor and racial conflicts. The unspoken friction over who controls the images is highlighted throughout this section with a large panel on old photography equipment.

After this section on material life, black men and women disappear from the stories in the museum. They exist only in a pre-development past and then only in a "cultural" mode. Like the folkloric contributions attributed to black West Indians in the UNESCO application, the Museum's exhibition highlights the role of West Indian as backwards cultural subjects. This is, however, much more attention than has been given black West Indians in most historical representations of the Canal construction. The pictures show "Silver Roll" housing, a West Indian wedding, and other scenes that would be generally be absent. The museum is thus actively trying to incorporate recent historical contributions to the field, particularly of labor and African Diaspora history. In fact, during her interview, Dr. Angeles mentioned the inclusion of these new methods, citing postmodernism in particular, as important discourses in the curating process. Yet these new additions are still nichefied in one section of the museum.

The next section shifts to a more traditional history of the American canal construction, highlighting the three Canal Commissions and their leadings engineers; John Findlay Wallace, John Frank Stevens, and finally, the man usually associated with the Canal, Colonel George Goethals. This is followed by a small section on the San Francisco World's Fair in 1915, named the Panama Pacific International Exposition in honor of the Canal construction. From here, the museum leaves the American focus and

turns to a nationalistic one, in an area titled "Canal Revindications." The panels display various moments of resistance against the American presence in Panama read as moments of national independence. A large video plays in this room, blasting the song "Viva Panama". The section "revindicates" Panama in its own history, crafting a narrative of national development from the times of the construction, while skirting the numerous conflicts of nation building during this time, particularly regarding race and immigration.

The exhibition continues with a discussion of the Canal Zone from its inauguration to 1979, focusing on the influence of the Canal on Panamanian society such as urban growth and the socio-cultural creation of the Panamanian nation. Though it is generally positive, this area condemns the forced cultural integration of America into Panama, and the American treatment of Panama "as a great bazaar" that could be bought and sold. The narrative pits the Panamanian nation against the American colonials, again ignoring the contours of Panamanian nation building. The purpose is to craft Panama as a stable and coherent nation, without internal conflicts, that is poised to grow into a global economic and cultural force. Because of this, the section ends with two great moments of Panamanian nationalism: the signing of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties and the 9th of January, 1964 (Martyr's Day). These movements against the American presence in Panama cement its status as an independently thriving nation that always understood and valued the Canal as a national project. Moreover, in depicting moments of national struggle, it shows Panama as a nation united against a common enemy.

This recreated history of the Panamanian nation culminates in the most recently added area, "The Canal in Panamanian Hands." The area feels markedly different from the rest of the museum with brighter lights, flashier poster and pictures of modern machines. Most of the photographs in this area show close-ups of machinery, panoramic shots of the Canal in action, and a few of workers building or laboring, supplemented by models of the Canal. The historical development of the Panamanian nation ends with a vision of the future where racial difference is absent. The end result of development, as shown here, is a technologically advanced, globally connected, and happily homogeneous nation.

Though some controversial issues, such as the Flag Riots, are addressed, many are also ignored. The 1989 U.S. invasion and the Noriega regime are not mentioned. In a previous interview, Dr. Ramos Baquero commented that the corruption of the Noriega period is incompatible with the mission to uplift the Panamanian nation.[76] The exclusion of such a significant moment in Panamanian history speaks to the importance the museum gives to its international funders and visitors, since the events surrounding Noriega could shed negative light on US intervention. Moreover, it could depict Panama as a politically unstable nation, which would be anathema to the idea of presenting it as responsible for the Canal ownership.

More recently, the Museum has created a "Specialized Center for the Study and Investigation of the Panama Canal Expansion," which seeks to preserve oral, visual and written testimony of this event, curate future exhibitions on the subject, and provide a

[76] Sanchez Laws, *Panamanian Museums and Historical Memory*, 83.

central space for researchers to learn about it. The center identifies three main themes in its research on the expansion: technology, space, and people. In terms of space, the project is interested in the transitions between what used to be American military spaces into useful educational or institutional spaces in Panama (like the City of Knowledge). In this, they follow the goals of the Panama Canal Authority saying that "In Panamanian hands, the Canal area is also part of a vision of national development that affects the whole route."[77] The "People" theme will take a labor focus, interviewing and archiving the data of the many workers who contributed to the expansion. The project in general seems to be privileging a focus on the last theme, technology. Like in the exhibition on the contemporary Canal, this project visualizes Panama as technologically developed and this development grounding its national identity. None of the heated national debates over the ecological effect of the expansion or the displacement of peoples seem to be addressed in this project.

The Interoceanic Canal Museum of Panama focuses more attention on black West Indians than a place like the Miraflores Locks. Its exhibition on the material life in the Canal Zone opens with a statue of a black photographer and contains several pictures depicting West Indians. However, after this moment of inclusion in cultural history, black West Indians and the racial conflicts that have plagued Panamanian nation building are silenced in favor of a positive narrative of the Panamanian nation. The museum's look towards the future of Panama envisions technological development, a growing global

[77] "Ejes Temáticos," Museo del Canal Interoceánico de Panamá, accessed on April 18, 2012, http://www.museodelcanal.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=84&Itemid=145

image, and a racially homogenous and harmonious nation.

CONCLUSION

The mission of cultural development by the Interoceanic Canal Musem is an attempt to combat the instability of Panamanian national identity since reversion. During the era of American presence, Panamanian nationhood was driven by its anti-colonial and anti-American sentiments. This is why moments like the Torrijos-Carter Treaties and the 9th of January receive so much attention within the museum—they are clear expressions of this Panamanian sentiment. But this clarity erodes after reversion, when international pressure forces Panama to present itself as a viable candidate for possession of the Canal. The Interoceanic Canal Museum serves as a diplomatic tool to represent a stable Panamanian identity. The developed Panama of the future is globally connected, technologically driven, capable of managing the Canal, and devoid of internal conflict.

As a site of conflict in the harmonious vision of the future, black Panamanians are erased from these narratives. They exist in the past, as folklore, but must be brought into development to integrate into the nation. Moreover, as Hall explains of Foucault, studying these new insidious forms of racism is significant because knowledge is "always inextricably enmeshed in relations of power because it was always being applied to the regulation of social conduct in practice (i.e. in particular bodies)."[78] The Interoceanic Canal Museum's mission of cultural development, as it is enmeshed with the raced

[78] Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Stuart Hall, ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 47.

bodies of Panama's history and its surrounding neighborhood, contributes to the continued exploitation of black labor and growing gentrification of the area.

Chapter 3: The Multiple Histories of the West Indian Museum[79]

The United Nations declared 2011 the International Year of Peoples of African Descent. In celebration, the West Indian Museum of Panama added to its collection a series of photographs taken by artist Rose Marie Cromwell entitled "Contemporary Images of West Indians in Panama." This series included photographs of various West Indian Panamanians living throughout Panama, accompanied by short descriptions of their lives and work. One shows a Santeria practitioner in Bocas del Toro; another shows a group of friends playing dominoes in Panama City. These pictures, set in the middle of the Museum, show West Indian contributions to Panama and the diversity of black experiences. But the same collection of photographs also emphasizes the "pastness" of the photographed subjects, placing them in a tone of nostalgia. The representation of black West Indian Panamanians within this photography series shows the conflicting forces at work in the West indian Museum, between the "development" goals of powerful Panamanian institutions and the goal of representing the community it purports to show.

The West Indian Museum refutes the silencing of race promoted by Panamanian liberal-modern institutions. Instead, it proudly proclaims that "the contribution of Afro-Antilleans has been essential to the progress of Panama."[80] This places black Panamanians at the center of national history. However, it also invests in hegemonic ideas of progress and development. The many frictions within the Museum and its

[79] In Spanish, the museum calls itself the "Museo Afro-Antillano." This translates directly to "Afro-Antillean Museum." However, in their English-language materials, the museum calls itself the "West Indian Museum." I will thus use the title they have chosen throughout the chapter.
[80] Tour, West Indian Museum (Panama City, Panama), taken on August 12, 2011.

funding organizations show how race complicates the universalizing concepts of development promoted by cultural institutions in Panama. The representation of black West Indians in this museum shows the hybrid negotiations of modernity within Panama.

I toured the museum twice during a field visit to Panama in August 2011. During this time, the museum was undergoing renovations. The main entrance was inaccessible, and one instead had to enter through the administrative offices in a small building next door, walk through the center grounds, and enter the museum through a side door. First, I will discuss the politics of representation being debated through the museum space by its funding organizations, the National Institute of Culture and the Society of Friends of the West Indian Museum of Panama (SAMAAP). Then, I will take the main exhibition of the museum as my central point of analysis. The museum provides free docent-led tours for every visitor, and I will include one such tour within my analysis. Lastly, I will focus on the museum's recently installed photography exhibit on contemporary West Indians. The museum did not allow photography or recording and thus, my analysis will stem mainly from field notes taken during my visits. Cromwell published part of this exhibit as an article in the academic journal *Latin American and Caribbean Studies* and I will use the pictures included there for my main analysis of her series.[81] I will look at these spaces as hybrid sites of history and memory, following the work of anthropologist Nestor Garcia Canclini. These are spaces that reflect the "multitemporal heterogeneity" of postcolonial

[81] Cromwell, Rose Marie. "Photographs from 'Afro-Antillean Sentiment'." *Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 4, no. 3 (2009): 343-346.

Latin American nation-states, where modernity is articulated as a hybrid of the modern and the traditional.[82]

Why is this particular museum relevant to a study of the representations of development in Panama? The museum's exhibits do not explicitly address "development." However, its position within the cultural landscape of Panama and its recent efforts at renovation place it in the midst of contemporary development discourses in Panama. The Museum serves as a site to "contradictorily celebrate[s] multicultural diversity just as it rationalizes hegemonic control of difference, access, and prevailing power,"[83] by depicting black contributions to the nation while cutting funding to this organization. Moreover, I sought to include a space where minority voices are privileged to discuss the conflicting historical memories surrounding the Canal. The West Indian Museum's historical narratives refute the unspoken white subject of the progressive development narratives in the Panama Canal Authority and the Interoceanic Canal Museum. The frictions in the West Indian Museum point to the centrality of race in contemporary Panamanian concepts of progress.

The negotiation of these frictions points to the hybrid nature of modernity in Panama exemplified by this museum. Garcia-Canclini's works shows how groups, particularly the popular sectors, have dealt with the incomplete and contradictory imposition of globalization and development in Latin America.[84] I follow his research to

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[82] Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Hyrbid Cultures : Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
[83] David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture* : *Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 8.
[84] Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures : Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minessota Press, 1995).

analyze how the West Indian Museum functions within the context of Panamanian development and how it develops a creative and hybrid cultural reality. The museum's exhibitions confront and expose the "long, impure history" of racial formation and development in Panama.[85] Appadurai also points to the rhizomic dimensions of cultural modernity:

> "the mega-rhetoric of development modernization (economic growth, high technology, agribusiness, schooling, militarization) in many countries is still with us. But it is often punctuated, interrogated and domesticated by the micro-narratives of film, television, music, and other expressive forms, which allow modernity to be rewritten more as vernacular globalization and less as a concession to large-scale national and international policies."[86]

Appadurai notes the hegemonic discourse of development that continues to delimit expressions of modernity on a global scale. However, he is more interested in the way modernity is differently articulated in various contexts, where cultural products create modernity as a web of complex and expressive relationships rather than a homogeneous and hegemonized whole. The West Indian museum is one of these sites of expression that "punctuates, interrogates and domesticates" the national narratives of development in Panama.

CONSTRUCTION AND CONTROL

The West Indian Museum of Panama sits on a busy intersection on Justo Arosemena Avenue. It is easy to miss because of its small size and because it is currently surrounded by construction of the Panama City Subway. The subway is one of the

[85] Garcia-Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, xxv.
[86] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 10.

biggest construction projects in Panama, estimated to cost around $1.6 million and built by an international consortium of French, Brazilian and Spanish corporations. This is the main public works project of the current presidential administration of Ricardo Martinelli. The subway functions as a symbol of the new development of Panama, and its expensive, international construction shows Panama's own growth into global capitalism. This juxtaposition, of the modest and aging museum and the modern symbol of development, exemplifies the debates within the museum itself, between the modernizing goals of the National Institute of Culture and other powerful Panamanian institutions, and the different articulations of this modernity from the West Indian community.

The museum is located in the Calidonia neighborhood of Panama City, in an area called El Marañon. It is housed in the former Christian Mission Church, built by Barbadians workers in 1910, in land ceded by the Trans-Isthmian Railroad Company. This neighborhood coalesced in the 1850's, during the construction of the Trans-Isthmian Railroad, as a site of *casas de inquilinato* and tenement housing for migrant workers.[87] Though some West Indians migrants moved there during the Canal construction, the biggest influx of West Indians came during the 50's and 60's.

During a period of urban renewal in the late 70s, the Ministry of Housing offered famous Panamanian anthropologist Reina Torres de Araúz the opportunity to take over property of historical value for cultural renovation and she chose the modest chapel. This period coincided with an increased nationalistic fervor stemming from the passing of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties of 1979, which set the timeline for complete turnover of the

[87] Ana Luisa Sanchez Laws, *Panamanian Museums and Historical Memory* (London: Museum of London and Berghahn Books, 2011), 88.

Canal Zone to Panama. Many other strategies of cultural-nationalist revival occurred during this period, such as the founding of the National Institute of Culture (1974) and the Museum of the Panamanian Man (1976), now the biggest museum in Panama, renamed the Reina Torres de Araúz Anthropological Museum. The West Indian Museum was inaugurated in 1980 to address the lack of visibility of West Indian Canal workers and to revitalize the working-class neighborhood of El Marañon.

Officially, the museum was built with funds from Reina Torres Araúz and is currently under the purview of the National Institute of Culture.[88] However, since its inception in the 80's, budget constraints have plagued the museum and in 1981, the SAMAAP was formed to address these financial troubles. The Society of Friends of the West Indian Museum of Panama[89] funds most of the physical maintenance of the museum, as well as the emotional and psychic investment in adding content and updating. They provide educational pamphlets, create publicity, organize cultural events at the museum, and fundraise to repair and upkeep the building and grounds. Meanwhile, the National Institute of Culture retains control over ticket profits, exhibits, curatorial and property decisions. In this sense, the museum is caught between two visions, constantly debating over appropriate representation of the West Indian community.

The National Institute of Culture (INAC), the government institution in charge of national museums, was founded in 1974, but it was not until 1995 that they became a

[88] Until 2011, the land where the museum is was owned by the Banco Hipotecario Nacional, though curatorial decisions were still in the hands of the INAC. After several years of political struggle, the SAMAAP finally succeeded in transferring land ownership from the Bank to the INAC itself, approved by the National Assembly. This means that, until last year, the Museum's financial troubles could mean losing the land to the bank.

[89] Sociedad de Amigos del Museo AfroAntillano de Panama.

powerful force after undergoing a revitalization process and moving to a larger building in the historic center of town. This coincided with the planned Canal Zone handover and the establishment of neo-liberal policies by the Balladares presidency. In recent years, the INAC has focused its resources on two large-scale museum projects: the Reina Torres de Araúz Anthropological Museum renovation and the Interoceanic Canal Museum. In light of this, the West Indian Museum has fallen even further in the list of priorities.

The INAC's vision statement states a notion of cultural development that informs recent museumizing projects: "To provide mechanisms for cultural integration, with designs in favor of socio-cultural development; thereby contributing to forging solid bases, for a dynamic and prosperous society in a globalized and modern world."[90] Modern-liberal keywords are present here as well: development, globalized, modern. Though the statement does not mention economics, favoring "socio-cultural development," the words "prosperous" and "dynamic" connote financial interests. Museums, then, provide the cultural rationale ("bases") for furthering globalization and economic development.

Their definition of development is also tied to what they term "cultural integration." The INAC does not explain this term further in any of their materials, but it has problematic implications for administrating the West Indian Museum. "Cultural integration" implies an assimilation of disparate elements into a cohesive whole, a "solid base." The INAC has this goal in mind when directing the curatorial efforts of the West

[90] Instituto Nacional de Cultura, "Sobre el INAC," last modified June 21, 2010, accessed April 8, 2012, http://200.90.132.195/inac.gob.pa/portal/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=2&Itemid=3

Indian Museum, pushing for a more "integrative" view of black West Indians in Panama, and possibly negating the historical and current conflicts of this relationship, such as labor unrest or pervasive racism. In describing the liberal investment in the racialization of modernity, Goldberg argues that "The more ideologically hegemonic liberal values seem and the more open to difference liberal modernity declares itself, the more dismissive of difference it becomes and the more closed it seeks to make the circle of acceptability."[91] The INAC's goal, though publicly accepting of difference, is committed to a homogenizing project of development. This mission of integration perpetuates the "myth of mestizaje" in Panama that racializes and discriminates against black West Indians.

Meanwhile, the SAMAAP also mobilizes discourses of development. In its 2010 newsletter, for example, organization President Glenroy James speaks of their desire to both serve the West Indian community and to increase its visibility in the growing tourism industry of Panama:

> "In the center of tourism politics, promoted by the National Government, in a country that wagers to be a point of controversy of many international visitors and large investments, the West Indian Museum, complemented by the Great West Indian Cultural Center, will also be a great tourist attraction, offering a folkloric, literary, and culinary variety, among others."[92]

The SAMAAP seeks to celebrate West Indian culture, but they also desire to capitalize on Panama's growing tourism, which has generally followed the blueprint of a

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[91] Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 6-7.

[92] Glenroy O. James-Grant, "Mesaje del Lic. Glenroy O. James-Grant, Presidente de SAMAAP," *SAMAAP NEWS : Boletín Informativo de la Sociedad de Amigos del Museo AfroAntillano de Panama,* February 1, 2010 - January 31, 2011 (Panama City), Page 3. Translation by author.

multiracial nation and racial harmony.[93] These are not mutually exclusive goals, but they do create a friction within the museum. James does emphasize that the Museum will be a "point of controversy" for both tourists and international investors. This shows an awareness of the deep ties of the cultural discourses of development with economic growth and globalization. It also shows that the SAMAAP seeks to place the Museum both within and without this development—a hybrid threatening to dismantle "tourism politics".

Along with the exhibitions, the SAMAAP seeks to make the Museum a meeting center for West Indian cultural life. Every May, for example, members of the SAMAAP organize a parade and educational presentations for the equivalent of Black History Month in Panama. Carnival marks another big yearly event for the Museum, when they host the West Indian Fair on the Saturday and Sunday of that week, including African dance groups, music, food, and the crowning of a Carnival Queen. In the same newsletter, James-Grant spoke of the plans to establish a "Great Cultural Center for Afro-descendants" by 2014, on the centennial of the Canal's construction. This purported cultural center, in the midst of a government-funded and tourist-friendly museum, would provide a central space for West Indian Panamanians to come together and express their concerns on a national and global stage.

The INAC and the SAMAAP are the two main funding and decision-making institutions involved in the West Indian Museum of Panama. Their goals and actions

[93] See Carla Guerrón Montero, "The Three Roots of Panama's Cultural Heritage," in *Cultural tourism in Latin America: the politics of space and imagery*, ed. Michael Baud and Johanna Louisa Ypeij (BRILL, 2009) for discussion on multiracial tourism in Panama's "ethnic village" Mi Pueblito.

show the growing frictions within the museum as the discourse of development (deeply intertwined with a growing tourism industry) becomes a central mission of the Panamanian government and its major institutions. Their interactions show the "web of transactions" that continually produces a hybrid history in the West Indian Museum.

MAIN EXHIBITION AND TOUR

The outside of the building is freshly painted grey with white trim, surrounded by palm trees (see Figure 6). The church is built in a style typical of vernacular wooden architecture throughout the urban Caribbean, though of a more modest scope than traditional examples of this type. Due to the vulnerability of wood, this architectural style has been disappearing rapidly to urban growth and environmental decay.[94] Though the church is well-maintained, it is certainly a far cry from the concrete structures of modern Panamanian buildings. An altar decoration remains on the back wall of the building from its previous iteration as a church, but renovated by the museum staff. The windows retain their old decorations as well, with stained glass above each of them. The place differs greatly from the violent sounds and harsh fluorescent lighting of the Miraflores Locks Visitors Center—perhaps it retains a sense of the sacredness in the building's past.

The exhibit is housed in the one-room interior of the church, constructed as a circular path around the space with sectioned photography areas in the center. To the right of the original entrance (currently closed due to construction), a small office desk

[94] Ron van Oers and S. Haraguchi, eds., "Caribbean Wooden Treasures: Proceedings of the Thematic Expert Meeting on Wooden Urban Heritage in the Caribbean Region," 4-7 February 2003, Georgetown, Guyana (UNESCO World Heritage Center, 2005), http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001429/142984e.pdf

serves as the reception and ticket booth. Next to it is a small shelf with educational materials about the Museum, West Indians in Panama and the SAMAAP. Not much is found here, and it's clear the SAMAAP is the only contributor, since they offer their yearly newsletter and secretary Melva Lowe de Goodin's play "From Barbados to Panama."[95]

The exhibition starts to the left of this, with a restored railroad wheelbarrow next to a standing mannequin of a black man. This entry corner is similar to other historical representations of the Canal construction—the mannequin is surrounded by a picture of Ferdinand de Lesseps, a map of the region, and pictures of the landscape in the middle of construction. Like the Miraflores Visitors Center, the museum begins chronologically with the French canal and highlights Panamanian geographical exceptionalism, male ingenuity and black male labor.

Much of the exhibit, like in other historical museums, consists of photographs. These are divided into thematic areas, such as "Women's Work," "Men's Work," and "Religion." All the signs are in both Spanish and English, speaking both to a tourist visitor and to the predominantly English-speaking Caribbean immigrants who came to Panama. However, almost none of the objects on display are accompanied with text, nor does the museum offer an information booklet. Without the guided tour, the exhibits are left context-less.

After the initial area, the museum turns to completely different themes, unexplored in most historical representations of Panama: black women and West Indian

[95] Melva Lowe de Goodin, *De Barbados a Panama* (Panama City, Panama: Editorial Geminis, 1999).

everyday cultural practices. The back area of the museum contains reconstructions of West Indian homes during the Canal construction period. One is of a bedroom, with a bed, armoire, and washbasin. The second is a balcony kitchen—because of Panama's tropical climate, many tenements placed stoves in the balcony to dissipate the heat. The third is a dining room, complete with decorations and a china cabinet. The lives and work of West Indian women, invisible in every other Panamanian institution, is what is highlighted throughout these spaces. The dining room, for example, contains a female mannequin dressed in bright Afro-Caribbean clothes and a head wrap. Other walls contain photographs of the Methodist Women's sewing club or paintings of women visiting the market (Figure 7). All of these items emphasize the role of West Indian women throughout Panama's history. This focus on women's cultural work refutes the ahistorical "underdeveloped" black laborer presented in the other museums. Through the work of black women, this museum argues, West Indians built lasting communities in Panama and contributed to its historical progress.

The museum generally does not focus on sites of conflict between West Indians and Americans or Panamanians, instead choosing to represent more of a look into "everyday life." The segregationist system of the American Canal Commission, where black workers were placed on the "silver roll," paid less and given worse facilities, and white workers were on the "gold roll," is mentioned but not spotlighted. Equally, the labor protests of the 1920's are not mentioned in the museum materials, though a picture

of UNIA founder and labor organizer Marcus Garvey alludes to that.[96] A resistant narrative is more obviously present in the tour, which is likely less controlled by the official INAC line than the museum exhibitions. The tour guide mentioned the labor unrest of the 20's when we approached Garvey's portrait and the racism of the silver roll system, saying the museum represented "lo que no cuentan" ("what they don't tell") about Panamanian history. The tension between the silences in the photographs and the stories of the tour guide shows again the repeated history-making at these sites. Here, the modern and the traditional converge in a combination of photographic portraiture, orality, and visitor participation.

Throughout its exhibits, tours, and promotional materials, the West Indian Museum attempts to subvert the historical timeline where other Panamanian institutions place black people. While other organizations create a division between a black laboring past and a whitened, developed future, the West Indian Museum reflects a circular and layered concept of time and community "development." Though the museum's temporal focus is on the Canal construction period and the decades right before and after, the items exhibited point towards an expanded view of historical time for West Indian presence in Panama. These exhibition spaces are filled with items donated by members of the SAMAAP, such as paintings gathered in Jamaica, photographs of old relatives, and the comforter for the bed. One display case titled "Medicinal Herbs" even contains live herbs in planters that were used in the Canal period for medicinal purposes.

[96] Garveyism was popular in Panama in the 20's. For more on this, see Mario Gandasegui et al., *Las Luchas obreras en Panama, 1850-1978*, 2nd Ed. (Panama City, Panama: CELA, 1990).

A clear example of these temporal connections is the photograph of George Westerman, a preeminent black West Indian Panamanian journalist and scholar from the 40's-50s who first brought attention to the plight and history of his community. Though Westerman was not directly associated with the Canal or the construction period, the presence of his portrait emphasizes the connections throughout time of Afro-Antillean people in Panama, their achievements in the nation, and their diasporic movement. His placement next to Marcus Garvey's portrait alludes to the labor struggles that Westerman documented in his time and West Indians continue to face today. These items, combined with the room recreations, bind the past to the present. Each of these items, though historical for being included in a museum, is clearly denoted as belonging to someone in the community. Unlike the items collected under colonial regimes and exhibited in historical museums like the Royal Africa Museum in Belgium or the (former) Museum of African and Oceanian Arts in France, the memory items at this museum forge links of memory across black communities.

This weaving of the personal and institutional continued throughout the tour. The guide often spoke of personal stories relating to the objects on display. For example, on approaching the antique hair iron, the tour guide told me of how her mother would straighten and pull her hair in the mornings before school. The tour guide's narrative throughout the museum also emphasized the role of West Indian women in this history such as when she told a story of her mother's cooking as we approached the balcony kitchen. In fact, the tour guide began her conversation by stating that the museum's strength was in showing how people lived and refuting the idea that only single,

temporary, black West Indian male immigrants moved to Panama. The tour guide explains the links among the varied items on display, showing the affective, diasporic and communal relationships that have come together in this museum.

It is important to note that the museum is uniquely focused on Afro-Antilleans or their descendents in Panama. Large Afro-descendent communities in El Darién and the Atlantic Coast of Panama from prior to the Canal construction are not included in the narrative of the museum.[97] Tourism in Panama has been built around a theme of harmonious multiculturalism, where West Indian is one of the three cultural roots that make up Panama, along with white and indigenous.[98] The choice to focus solely on West Indians was a choice from the beginning by Reina Torres de Araúz. Making the Museum into a popular tourist site requires this continued privileging of West Indians over other black experiences in Panama.

The exhibition at the West Indian Museum presents a diverse array of memory items, creating a space that defies the homogenizing national project of development and tourism. Though it caters somewhat to the growing tourism industry, the museum display is mostly devoted to highlighting the affective and generational links among West Indian Panamanians. Instead of the focus on economic and technological development, the museum exhibits a multi-geo-temporal hybrid version of community development. The tensions that pressure the museum are clear in its modest infrastructure and the

[97] For more on the racial formation of blackness in Panama and this particular debate, see George Priestley, "Antillean-Panamanians or Afro-Panamanians? Political Participation and the Politics of Identity during the Carter-Torrijos Treaty Negotiations," *Transforming Anthropology* 12, no. 1 & 2 (2004): 50-67.
[98] Guerrón Montero, "The Three Roots of Panama's Cultural Heritage," 53.

alternative histories that the tour guide adds to the exhibit. More recently, these tensions have arisen in the new addition to the Museum's permanent collection.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF A MODERN DAY COMMUNITY

In the center of the space, right in front of the entrance, the museum was exhibiting Rose Marie Cromwell's photographic series, "Contemporary Images of West Indians in Panama."[99] Cromwell took these pictures as part of a Fulbright sponsored research trip to Panama in 2007, focusing on Panama City, Colon and the historically Afro-descendent area of Bocas del Toro. The photographs include "everyday" Afro-Panamanians describing their jobs and lives, such as a calypso musician, a Rastafarian, a priestess and a tailor.

Cromwell's photographs were initially exhibited in a gallery show at the Diablo Rosso gallery, a "creative think thank" that has expanded the number of art spaces in Panama. At the time of Cromwell's gallery show, Diablo Rosso was located in one of the most expensive areas of Panama City, the neighborhood of Bella Vista, around the corner from Calle Uruguay, a street that caters to the tourism industry with its string of bars, nightlife, and hotels. Later, it moved to Casco Viejo, the old quarter of the city, where it has served as a force of gentrification in a neighborhood historically inhabited by black people. In 2011, the exhibit was placed in the permanent collection of the West Indian Museum.

This exhibit opens with Cromwell's own words, describing the themes in her piece of multiple identities and ancestries:

[99] Originally titled "Afro-Antillean Sentiment" in its first gallery show.

> "Panamanians of Afro-Antillean descent have had multiple national and cultural identities. Their ancestors' past is layered with struggle and survival, but even through this they have maintained a strong sense of pride. From Africa to the Caribbean to Panama and to the United States and back, their history, and therefore, their culture, is complex…[ ]
> The community of Caribbean descendants in Panama is, however, at a crucial point of change. Because of the great discrimination by both Americans and Panamanians, those of Caribbean descent have faced much adversity while cultivating their Panamanian national identity. As they have overcome much of this inequity and become more integrated into Panamanian society, they have begun to lose some aspects of their Caribbean Culture, mainly their language—English. While traces of their communities still exist, for the most part the tightly knit neighborhoods have vanished leaving them at a crossroads in their history. This adds a sense of urgency to document a culture that may not exist in the future."

Cromwell's opening text frames the photographs as representations of a community with complex identities based on traditional and diasporic linkages. It notes (in an excluded section) the many cultural achievements and community building of West Indians in Panama throughout history. However, it also squarely places West Indian Panamanian identity as a disappearing identity—one that is in the process of losing its uniqueness due to its integration into Panamanian society. Cromwell's textual explanation is squarely in a nostalgic mode, already missing a culture that still exists.

Her last sentence further emphasizes this point. The photographer becomes the anthropologist, obligated to salvage the vestiges of a dying cultural past that may not exist in the future. Cromwell's text seeks to create a positive representation of the West Indian community in Panama. However, her work ends up showing West Indian culture as incompatible with development (much like the Panama Canal Authority's representation). West Indians, for example, have "lost their language" of English—a skill

nowadays required for an adequately "developed" and global subject. They are instead stuck in an anachronistic space, unable to manage the contradictions of modernity.

This theme of pastness is present in calypso musician Ringing Bell's picture and accompanying text (Figure 8). Cromwell's text again romanticizes a past moment, where calypso was heard the way it was "meant to be." It mentions soca and reggeaton, but does not fully address these as part of West Indian or black culture. There are no reggeatoneros among Cromwell's photographs. Perhaps, like Jossianna Arroyo discusses in the debates around Puerto Rico's *Raices* video, musical genres like calypso are seen as authentic black cultural products, whereas newer musical genres like hip-hop (and reggeaton) are seen as modern, foreign influences.[100] Many of the pictures reiterate nostalgia for black cultural authenticity and the series ignores the hybrid cultural production of black modernity.

The photograph places Ringing Bell in the middle of the frame, lit by a strong light coming from the top right, casting a long shadow. The light shines only on him, while his surroundings are shrouded in black, though it's clear he is in a music club (Bombardy's).[101] A similar strategy of spotlighting the subject with surrounding black is repeated in other pictures. All the pictures are lit with artificial light, clear from the strong shadows and light quality. With a few exceptions, most of the photographs present the subject alone. Ringing Bell's picture, for example, includes some shadowy figures in the background, shrouded in black. The community of people that surround these subjects are

[100] Jossianna Arroyo-Martinez, ""Roots" or the virtualities of racial imaginaries in Puerto Rico and the diaspora," *Latino Studies* 8 (2010): 195-219.
[101] The photograph's notes place him in Bombardy's, Parque Lefevre, Panama.

non-existent in the photographs. Instead, the photos create a relationship between the subjects and their physical environment. Ringing Bell exists in the calypso club, and Victor Jonah in the dilapidated kitchen where he makes his Johnny Cakes. Cromwell's interest in locality is evident in these decisions, in a similar nostalgic way. The technology that surrounds Ringing Bell, for example, is set in the darkness, separating him from his hybrid-modern expression of calypso, which Cromwell characterizes as an art of the past. Ringing Bell is photographed as this fading star, representative of the vanishing of "authentic" West Indian culture like calypso.

Not every photograph is as extreme as Ringing Bell's, and some show more vivacious movements and color from their subjects, such as the photograph of Ms. Marva Gamara, a practitioner of African-influenced religion in Bocas del Toro (Figure 9).[102] Though the spotlighting is not as intense, the light still centers on her, leaving the background in dark black, which again gives a sense of nostalgia. Cromwell chose to represent these subjects as living in a space of twilight—a decaying space, slowly falling into forgetting after the fullness of what Cromwell describes as the heyday of West Indian culture. But unlike Ringing Bell, Ms. Gamara is photographed sitting on a doorway, wearing bright green, surrounded by people and live, green plants. The representation of Ms. Gamara has a more positive outlook on the future of West Indian religious culture—it is still alive and part of a community, though it stands on a threshold.

[102] The note under the photograph talks about various "sects" of "African ritual-influenced Christian religions," among them Santeria, but does not ascribe Ms. Gamara any particular religion.

Cromwell's last paragraph, closing out the photography exhibit, questions the politics of national historical representation itself:

> "The psychology of attachment to locality is a strong and complicated phenomenon, with different possible modes of articulation and different outcomes for peoples' sense of self and of existential well-being. The Afro-Antillean experience illustrates today how hard it can be to cultivate a "National" identity that is all-inclusive. How does a country choose to represent itself? Who makes these decisions and for what reason? What is the consequence for underrepresented subcultures?"

Panamanian institutions heavily supported by state and corporate interests, like the Panama Canal Authority and the Interoceanic Canal Museum, have "chosen to represent" Panama as a nation on the brink of economic and technological development. Panama, in their vision, can become a "First World" nation with all the associated erasing of race. Cromwell's project seeks to interrogate the hegemonic status of this national discourse. The diversity of experiences shown in the photographs questions the homogenizing national identity built around development and the inequalities of power created by this discourse. It shows vision of identity that relates to Garcia-Canclini's concept of hybridity—a locality of multiple attachments and articulations. This photography project encapsulates the frictions in the Museum, as a "mixture of heterogeneous memory and truncated innovation."[103] It presents and preservers the memories and experiences of a diversity of West Indian Panamanians, but it also contributes to the discourse of black backwardness and the forces of urban gentrification.

[103] García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, 14–15.

CONCLUSION

Garcia-Canclini argues that the articulation of hybridity can become productive. In this case, the Museum's complex web of influences and representations creates a site that ultimately refutes and questions dominant narratives of development and modernization in Panama, even as it invests in them. I turned to the West Indian Museum last to show more explicitly the hybridity of development discourse throughout Panama. Though other Panamanian institutions have presented a homogenized and homogenizing image of development, the West indian Museum highlights the continual frictions and debates that color this discourse. The discourse of development is pervasive throughout Panama, even in this space, but it is not hegemonic, nor can it be.

Conclusion

I began this thesis asking how the discourse of development is represented throughout Panamanian cultural institutions and what this implied for Panamanian national identity. In analyzing the work of the Panama Canal Authority, the Interoceanic Canal Museum and the West Indian Museum, I found that race and raced bodies were a site of tension within these representations. These spaces show black West Indians as backwards, requiring and justifying development. Meanwhile, they also show a vision of Panama's future as technologically developed, globally significant and devoid of racial conflict or difference. National identity in Panama, then, is necessarily tied into the growing discourse of development and the place of the black subject within this nation.

What these projects ultimately show is a continuing crisis with the myth of development and of homogeneous "Old" national identities. As development continues to gain traction in Panama, political and cultural visibility for black West Indians diminishes in favor of a vision of a harmonious mestizo paradise. People are displaced by international real estate investments, black people disappear from national museums, and sites like the West Indian Museum lose funding. The "Angel of Progress," as Anne McClintock calls it, with its almost ritualistic belief in the fundamental good of Westernized development, continues to delimit the possible hybrid modernities in the so-called "Third World."[104]

[104] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 391-396.

This project is just an entry into the complex and nation-wide project of development within Panama. Apart from a few notes about the representation of black women in the Interoceanic Canal Museum and the West Indian Museum, my analysis generally did not gender these discourses of development. Most of the materials on development, except for the West Indian Museum exhibition, are marked by the invisibility of women. However, gender is always a component, even if it seems absent on the surface. Studying the gendered aspects of development would point further at the fragmentation these discourses create. More work on the reception of these representations would also be helpful in understanding the complicated flows of development discourse.

This project urges us to rethink the cultural dimensions of globalization and development, focusing on the multiplicity of experiences and negotiations that make up the contemporary landscape. Though globalization and development are portrayed as universally good and *fait accompli*, these discourses are in fact created, implemented, received, and hybridized in uneven ways. The attempt to homogenize Panamanian national identity in the service of development erases the diversity of subjectivities that compose a nation.

Appendix: Figures

Figure 1: "Por Qué Hay que Ampliar."

Autoridad del Canal de Panama. Public pamphlet. Panama City, Panama, 2006. Accessed in August 2011 at Biblioteca Nacional de Panama.

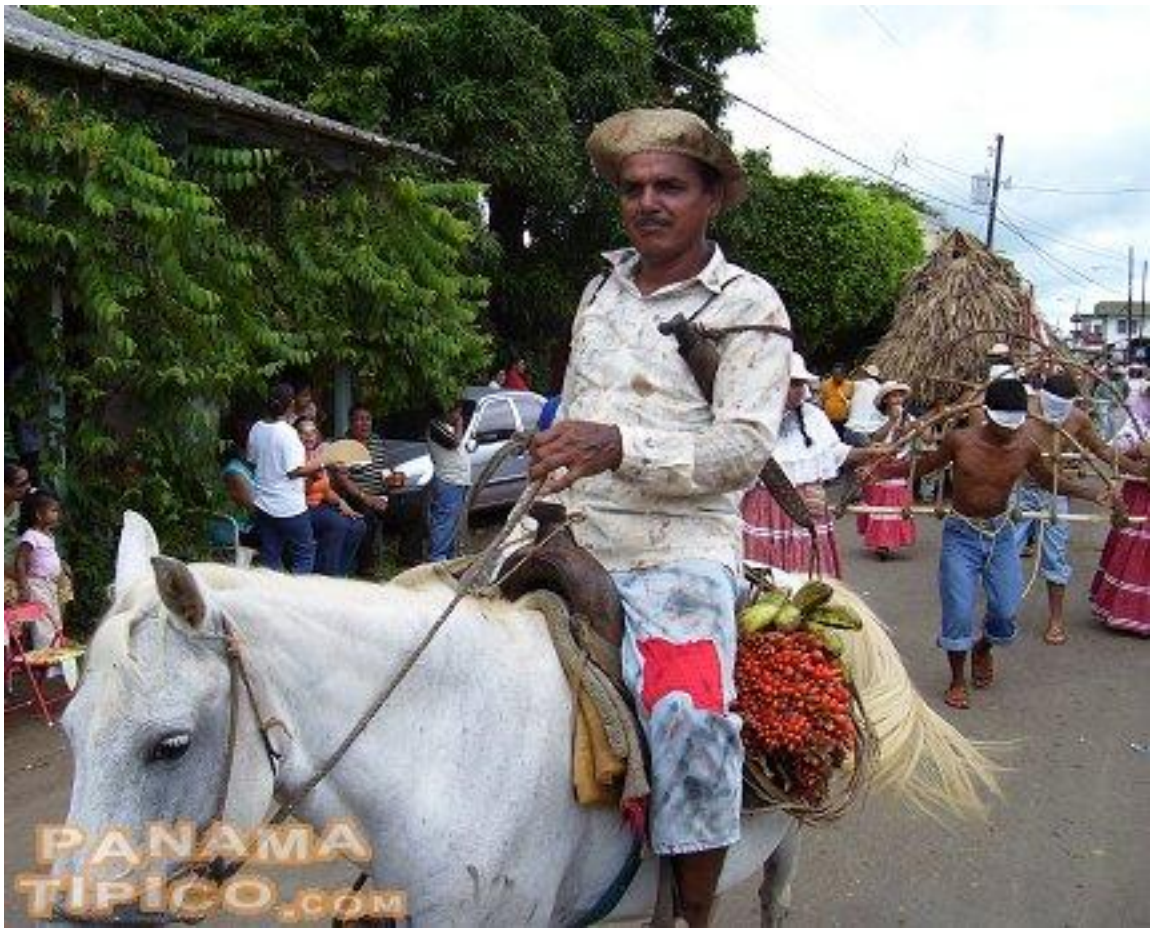

Figure 2: "Manito" or male peasant style from the Festival del Manito Ocueño.

Ocu Gutierrez, “Festival del Manito Ocueño.” Panama Típico. Last modified on September 1, 2004, last accessed on April 24, 2012.

http://fiestas.panamatipico.com/articulo.php?articulo=36

Figure 3: "Por Qué Hay que Ampliar," p. 5.

Autoridad del Canal de Panama. Public pamphlet, Panama City, Panama, 2006. Accessed in August 2011 at Biblioteca Nacional de Panama.

Figure 4: Teatime in the private residence of Division Engineer Col. Gaillard and his wife.

Ernest Hallen, Official Photographer of the Isthmian Canal Commission.

In Ulrich Keller. *The Building of the Panama Canal in Historic Photographs*. New York: Dover Publications, 1983.

Figure 5: Miraflores Locks Visitors Center, Panama City, Panama.

Photograph by author.

Figure 6: Exterior of West Indian Museum. Panama City, Panama.

Photograph by author.

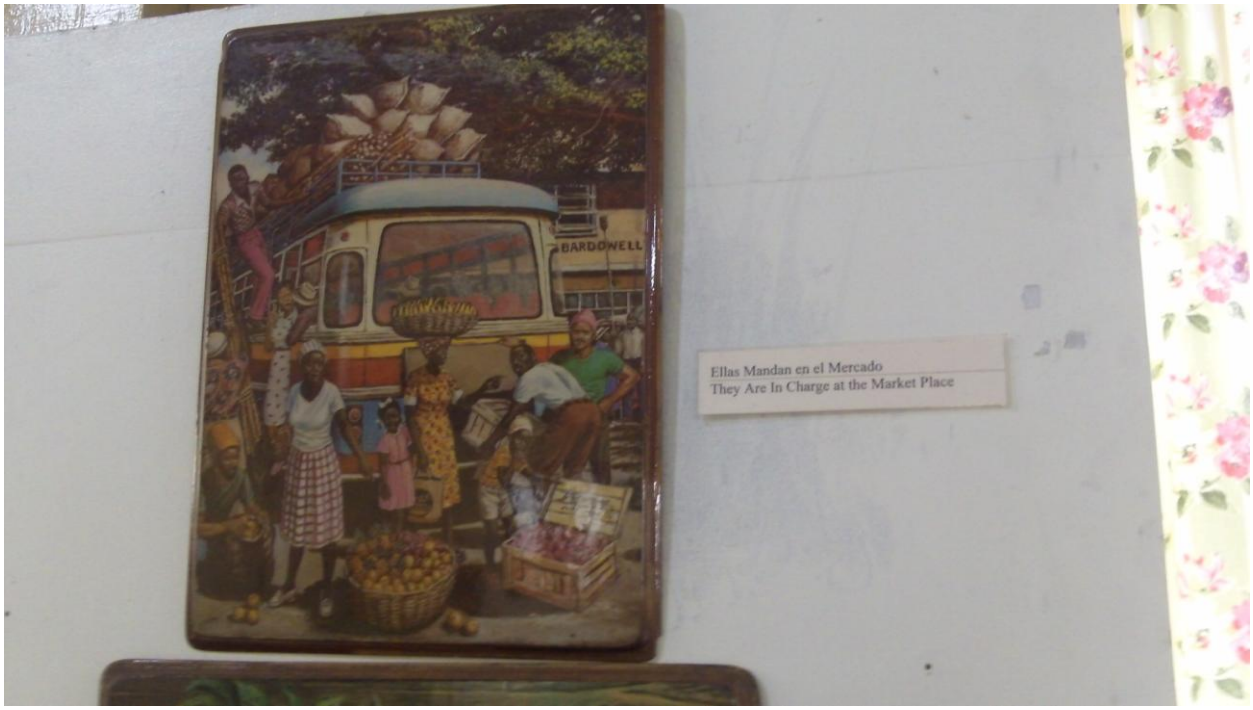

Figure 7: “Ellas Mandan en el Mercado.” West Indian Museum. Panama City, Panama. Photograph by author.

Figure 4 Ringing Bell, Bombardy's, Parque Lefevre, Panama. There is a last generation of calypsonians, old legends, who all know that it is more important to have a sense of wit than it is to have a melodic voice. One of these Calypso greats, Lord Panama, told me that he does not relate to his African heritage, he does not necessarily relate to notions of black pride, but he will categorize himself as a self-taught calypsonian, a lover and expert of this music he has grown with. On Sunday nights, Lord Panama, accompanied by Ringing Bell (pictured in the photograph) Lord Wimba, and 'The Sauce' perform at Bombardy's in Parque Lefevre. However, in the past, you did not have to wait for Sunday nights to hear Calypso. It was the sound of the street corner, of the unemployed rebel. Today these musicians are of the oldest generation and you can hear the influence of calypso on music in Panama (soca then soca/reggaeton), but today you cannot really hear much calypso in the spontaneous, casual way that it was meant to be heard.

Figure 8: Ringing Bell.

Rose Marie Cromwell. "Photographs from 'Afro-Antillean Sentiment'." *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 4, no. 3 (November 2009): 346.

Figure 3 Ms Marva Gamara, Bocas Town, Bocas del Toro. The African Diaspora created an array of cultural juxapositions in various parts of the world, but one of the most interesting has been the creation of dozens of African ritual-influenced Christian religions. Some sects were based from Catholicism but, especially in the Caribbean islands such as Jamaica and Barbados, Protestant missionaries had a stronger presence. These religions vary over a wide spectrum of ideologies and traditions. In Panama there are Spiritual Revival Churches, with the most identifiable characteristic their tendency to talk in tongues and make random movements when the Holy Spirit enters their body.

Gaining legitimacy for this religious sect has proven to be an obstacle even within the Afro-Antillean community itself. Many of their methods of worship are tradition based and are not strictly dictated in the bible, unlike mainstream Christianity sects that pride themselves on following the bible verbatim. People will readily refer to the members of these churches as Santeriaists. While both are syncretistic religions, the Spiritualists do not set spells or communicate with the devil. They would like to separate themselves from this great misunderstanding.

Figure 9: Ms. Marva Gamara.

Rose Marie Cromwell. "Photographs from 'Afro-Antillean Sentiment'." *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 4, no. 3 (November 2009): 345.

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